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CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGION:
W.O. MITCHELL, BUCKLER, MACLEOD, AND VANDERHAEGHE

BY

ELROY E. E. DEIMERT ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

FALL 1994

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS: W.O. MITCHELL, BUCKLER, MACLEOD, AND VANDERHAEGHE submitted by ELROY E. E. DEIMERT in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Dr. Dick Harrison

Dr. Dale Wilke

Dr. Douglas Barbour

Prof. James Defelice

Dr. Dennis Cooley

Sept. 19, 1994

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS:

W.O. MITCHELL, BUCKLER, MACLEOD, AND VANDERHAEGHE

Abstract

Starting with observations that sense of place is often valorized in Canadian Fiction studies, this study argues that some of the best regional fiction of W.O. Mitchell, Ernest Buckler, and Alistair MacLeod often evokes a sense of place by juxtaposing the local idyllic impulses with the existential and socioeconomic realities of their regions. The synthesis is a distinctive mode of "dialectical realism" that features insight into the tension between the characters' ideals and the realism of their social, economic, psychological, or cultural limitations. The idyllic impulses originate both from Old World mythology and from New World Canadian primitivism. In an effort to enhance their fictions' realism and regional distinctiveness, these writers chronicle the social and psychological impacts of such idyllic impulses.

The study also examines Guy Vanderhaeghe's mode of contemporary naturalistic fiction as a representative counterpoint to the fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, and Macleod, arguing that Vanderhaeghe avoids most idyllic impulses, while still managing to evoke a sense of place through well-crafted dialogic voices, but in a more traditional form of the ironic mode. The study contrasts the strengths (and some drawbacks) of both "dialectical realism" and contemporary naturalism, occasionally identifying common stylistic techniques. For

example, both Vanderhaeghe and MacLeod create narrative voices that uphold Bakhtin's ideals of dialogized, polyphonic language inspired by and reflecting on the sociolinguistic milieu. These voices educate the reader to the socioeconomic and cultural realities of the regions.

Thus, during modern realism's late advent in Canadian fiction, the innovations of Mitchell and Buckler developed a distinctive dialectical mode of realism that continues to evolve in our contemporary regional fiction (exemplified here by MacLeod's dialectical realism). So, the innovations of Mitchell and Buckler at mid-century encouraged a divergent mode of realism, and thus a continuing pluralism in Canadian regional fiction. This study celebrates the blossoming and evolution of such pluralism in contemporary regional fiction, as demonstrated by the disparate modes and styles of MacLeod, Vanderhaeghe, and Mitchell whose dialogic narrative voices and thematic universality have helped to make our regional fiction a prime product for national export.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

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CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS:
W.O. MITCHELL, BUCKLER, MACLEOD, AND VANDERHAEGHE

Chapter 1: SENSE OF PLACE

INTRODUCTION

Canadian fiction studies exhibit a general consensus that sense of place is a distinguishing feature of Canadian regional fiction. Northrop Frye's often quoted aphorism suggests that Canadian Literature's prime question has more to do with "where is here?" than "who am I?". Again, one of MacLulich's arguments in *Between Europe and America* is that sense of place in Canadian fiction is a major characteristic of "our first period of real literary maturity" (140), which he believes begins around World War II. But he also argues that sense of place, or the "discovery of the literary potential of [the] native regions" (65) is at least partially inherited from the lightly regarded regional idyll, popular around the turn of the century. This contention is supported by surveys of Canadian Prairie and Atlantic fiction, like Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes* and Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country*.

The present study argues that, in a portion of our best regional fiction, sense of place is often evoked by juxtaposing idyllic impulses against more dominant elements of

mimetic realism. The resulting synthesis is a mode of modern and contemporary realism (for which I will coin the term "dialectical realism") that evokes a distinctive sense of place, distinctive partially because these idyllic impulses are rooted in both the local popular cultures and the broader traditional culture, just as they are reflected in our regional idylls. Furthermore, this deliberate dialectic between the idyllic and the mimetic has often invigorated Canadian fiction, rather than relegating it to the colonial backwaters of culture that many modernist critics feared was the only possible status for anything remotely connected to the regional idyll.

The idyllic impulses referred to in the thesis do not usually reflect the author's impulses so much as the culture's notions of idealized landscape, idealized character, and idealized social or moral order. In most of the fiction studied here, the writers consciously chronicle (ultimately for mimetic ends) the existence of idyllic impulses in the ideologies of the societies reflected by their fiction. Such fiction is quite different in mode and form from the mid-century popular radio tales of *Jake and the Kid* or Ted Russel's Newfoundland outport tales collected in *The Chronicles of Uncle Mose* (Breakwater 1975), and certainly this fiction is more sophisticated than the turn-of-the-century regional idylls like *Anne of Green Gables* or Duncan's *The Way of the Sea*. Such regional idylls mix a good deal of comic

romance with a bit of mimetic realism and a lot of local colour. The characters are often traditional types and both character and landscape are idealized. On the other hand, the fiction studied here is more serious modern and contemporary realism that reflects an awareness of the roots of idyllic impulses.

Further toward a functional definition of idyllic, the disparity between *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Way of the Sea* highlights the broader context of my use of *the term idyllic* as differentiated from *pastoral*, though the latter has always been a predominant form of the idyll. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says the root of *idyll* is the Greek *eidyllion*, a descriptive poem (literally "a little picture"). The term is a diminutive of *eidos* meaning "idealized form." The *OED.* cites *World* (April 16, 1879): "An Idyl is . . . not necessarily concerning pastoral matters." In this study Montgomery's novel is seen as indulging in *pastoral* description and character types (hence, idyllic), while Duncan's novel indulges in the idyllic, but not as much in the common edenic or bucolic connotations of *pastoral* as in a type of Canadian primitivism. The pastoral is a common form of the more inclusive idyllic mode, and in this study the idyllic includes *any* "idealized form" or valorized form of landscape, character, social order, or moral order, including Duncan's creation here of an adversarial but idealized sentient sea with the voice and the power of a local deity much like

Poseidon (see Duncan, *Way* 121-22). Similarly, the earthy *habitant* and the romanticized lumberjack or *courier de bois* are all idyllic types in Quebec's regional idylls, but the habitant is the more pastoral and bucolic of the types. Thus, though the prototypical idylls of Theocritus portray purely pastoral characters and setting, the term idyllic now has a broader meaning (certainly since Tennyson and Browning) which includes Canadian primitivism, and that breadth shall be exploited in this study. Subsequent definition of idyll and pastoral by critics like Northrop Frye and Alan Young will relate the concepts more directly to Canadian fiction and specifically to the fiction studied here.

On the other side of the dialectic, the term, *realism*, in this study seldom refers to the historical era of literature leading into modernism, but rather to any broadly mimetic aspects of fiction which are antithetical to the idealizations characteristic of the Romance genres. The elements of mimetic realism that are in dialectic relation to the idyllic impulses in this fiction include an eclectic mixture of naturalistic realism, social realism, and psychological realism. Some quick examples might be Mitchell's dialectic in *Who Has Seen the Wind* between Brian's idyllic visions of nature and the harsher naturalistic and amoral prairie revealed to him later in the novel, or the dialectic in Alistair MacLeod's stories between the traditional Cape Breton ideals (especially from the gaelic folk culture) and the socioeconomic realism of

poverty and deprivation among the miners and fisherman. In Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* the dialectical realism comes from the ironic juxtaposition of David's idyllic vision of his rural community and the reader's recognition of David's psychological failures and his self-deception about his own progress toward leadership and artistic authority.

The juxtaposition of such realism with the idyllic is not the only way that these writers develop a sense of place, but this dialectic mode does seem to create distinctively regional and Canadian voices, partially due to the inclusion of strong reactions by the writers toward or against the local idyllic impulses, which dominated our regional idylls at the turn of the last century. Structurally, the vigour of this dialectical mode is often more noticeable in the narrative voices than in the necessarily mimetic dialogue, so the narrative voices provide a convenient, though not exclusive, starting place in the fiction studied here.

Dennis Cooley, in *The Vernacular Muse*, asserts a compelling inductive premise that "sense of place" is discovered through voice (168). He supports this more in the context of Western Canadian Poetry than in the context of prose, but it has interesting implications for the study of regional Canadian fiction. Cooley's premise, as applied here, supplies a methodology and a starting point: that is, this study focuses on how the voices in the fiction (especially the narrative voices) help to develop this sense of place,

particularly through the self-conscious (as opposed to naive) exploration of idyllic impulses within this mode of dialectical realism.

THE FOCUS

This study focuses on the fiction of W.O. Mitchell, Ernest Buckler, Alistair MacLeod, and Guy Vanderhaeghe. These writers obviously can only partially represent their particular regions and eras, so we will occasionally range further afield both within these regions and within others. One of the purposes in studying at least two regions is to establish that the various voices invoke a different sense of place in each region, confirming the findings of the two most thorough thematic studies of Canadian regional fictions to date: Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country*, on Prairie fiction, and Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes*, on Maritime fiction. These two studies themselves make up a second strong reason for focusing on these two particular regions, since so much groundwork has been prepared and so much insight garnered. Thirdly, both regions have relatively long traditions of fiction commonly categorized as regional. Related to that is perhaps the most important point, that the regional idyll figures quite significantly in the literary history of these two regions.

Mitchell and Buckler anchor the study historically, because each is an important regional (and national) voice

emerging near the advent of mature modern realism in his region. Both have been identified as major regional influences by those previous studies of regional fiction. Lastly, both are noted for occasionally displaying pastoral impulses in evoking landscape through their narrative voices.

The choice of the two contemporary writers, one from each region, does not argue for any particular symmetry in the regional development of fiction, nor for symmetry in their writing styles. In fact, they are chosen to represent two significantly different modes of realism in our contemporary fiction. Vanderhaeghe's fiction is perhaps an eccentric choice because his contemporary naturalistic mode is used as a counterpoint and a contrast to the mode of dialectical realism featured in the fiction of the other three. To some extent at least, he is writing in reaction against certain idyllic and pastoral impulses which he sees lingering in some popular regional fiction like Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid* tales, Annett's *Especially Babe* stories, or McClung's sentimental novels. In most of his fiction he deliberately eschews reference to pastoral icons of prairie landscape like grain elevators, stooks, and prairie sunsets (Vanderhaeghe, Personal). Like Richards, Ross, Birdsell, and many other like-minded realists, Vanderhaeghe actively seeks to eradicate from his fiction elements of romance or pastoral impulses like idealization of landscape, character, or social order, all of which were common in Prairie and Atlantic fiction up to and

throughout the early half of this century.

Vanderhaeghe's mode of fiction is not peculiar to the region; it is rather a mainstream ironic mode that features a type of contemporary naturalism where the victim-like protagonists and the emphasis on environmental determinism remind one of Chekhov, Joyce (in *Dubliners*), and closer to home, Ross, Richler, and Munro. Vanderhaeghe's characters are often earthy and common, but not folksy--salty, but not so loveable. His protagonists usually have only a partial understanding of the social and economic environments which dictate their misfortunes. Few prairie writers employ this mode as convincingly as Vanderhaeghe, but this kind of naturalistic realism makes up a significant part of Atlantic and Prairie fiction today, so that it seems prudent to represent his mode in contrast to the dialectical realism of the other three.

Beyond these qualities, Vanderhaeghe's fiction often contains an intriguing, subtle, and self-conscious challenge to the ghosts of pastoralism and romance, though this never dominates the structures and conflicts, as it does in MacLeod's fiction. Also, Vanderhaeghe's naturalism is unique in that it occasionally questions some of the basic tenets of environmental determinism (see the title story of *Things as They Are?*); this seems unusual in fiction that is decidedly ironic and naturalistic. This complexity, along with his wit, philosophical depth, and memorable narrative voices, makes him

a valuable and representative case study.

In contrast, MacLeod is expanding and refining innovative narrative strategies and styles, as did Buckler and Mitchell, toward establishing an insightful dialectic between the dominant mimetic realism and the idyllic impulses so commonly reflected in the Atlantic regional idylls and in the local regional cultures (Gaelic folk songs, stories, and beliefs). This kind of juxtaposition of the idyllic against the mimetic is also representative of an ongoing variant mode of realism in the tradition of Mitchell and Buckler, quite distinct from the one represented by Vanderhaeghe. The distinctiveness and strengths of the dialectical mode represented by MacLeod are, hopefully, better understood by contrast and comparison to the more established mode represented by Vanderhaeghe. Both modes have their strengths and both are capable of evoking a strong sense of place, but this mode of dialectical realism has received less attention and little analysis.

The choices of MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe might seem easily defendable, given their reputations, but one can not help noticing that the overall selection excludes the fiction of Laurence, Birdsell, or Richards. These writers, by virtue of reputation or talent, might well be chosen as representatives of contemporary realistic fiction in their region. However, in the case of MacLeod, there is no other Atlantic writer of any repute who comes close to inheriting the mantle of Buckler and Mitchell in terms of concern with landscape and the

dialectic between mimetic realism and idyllic impulses.

For the sake of symmetry, David Adams Richards could be chosen to represent the contemporary Atlantic region to parallel Vanderhaeghe's naturalistic tendencies, but that might suggest that contemporary regional writers have all reacted strongly to shun the regional idyll roots, or that they have all avoided the option of juxtaposing realism and the regional idyllic impulses. It would suggest that such a dialectical mode was just a passing transitional phase between the lightly regarded regional idyll and our belated embrace of modern and postmodern modes of fiction. This study argues that such is not the case, that the two variant modes of realism represented by the fiction of Vanderhaeghe and MacLeod are continuing and viable traditions in Canadian regional fiction. Other authors pursuing each of these modes are mentioned briefly in the final chapter, as well as throughout the middle chapters.

So to summarize the rationale, Vanderhaeghe's work is chosen as a stylistic counterpoint to the fiction of Buckler, MacLeod, and Mitchell. The choice to focus on these writers is not primarily because they best represent their time and region, but rather because they best illustrate some salient points about the history and development of Canadian regional fiction, particularly about the role of fictional voices (especially narrative voices) in creating distinctive modes and distinctive regional fiction. For example, Margaret

Laurence's narrative voices in the Manawaka series were never as controversial as Mitchell's narrative voices in *Who Has Seen the Wind*; nor could her fiction ever be accused of being a weak transition between the regional idyll and modern realism, as Laurence once suggested about the *Jake and the Kid* collection (Laurence 170). This type of critical assessment and controversy is examined carefully here by analyzing the voices in the fiction of these four authors.

TERMS AND CONCEPT FOR THE METHODOLOGY

One of the first questions that might arise is why the examination of structure and style should focus strongly (though not exclusively) on narrative voices. Surely Cooley's concept of "voice" is broader than that. It is true that, when Cooley says that sense of place is discovered through voice, his first line of examples come from Western Canadian poetry, in particular, poetry that follows a "vernacular muse," (for example, Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems* or Wayman's *Waiting for Wayman*). He is mainly addressing poetry which adopts a mimetic voice from the social milieu of the poem, as opposed to the diegetic[1] authorial voice of a

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[1] The categories of *diegetic* and *mimetic* hark back to Plato's and Aristotle's differing categories for narrative discourse. Plato separated "pure narration" (diegesis) from "perfect imitation" (mimesis) as two distinct parts of narrative discourse (Genette 162). Aristotle, in *Poetics*, treated both the character's monologues and the narrator's "monologues" as two different kinds of mimesis (15, 18). Henry James's dictum that the narrative voice should "show rather than tell" relates well to the Platonic analysis, but

meditation, which Mikhail Bakhtin describes as *monologic* as opposed to *dialogic* (*Dialogic* 296). However, many prominent theorists on genre, like Bakhtin (*Dialogic* 296-97) and Northrop Frye (*Anatomy* 246-47) classify all poetry as being generally monologic, as using a voice closely identified with the author. There is a danger here of ignoring a whole history of dramatic monologues and "character" voices in poetry, but one can understand how the bulk of modern poetry and modern criticism in poetics could lead to such generalizations.

Thus, the point is that fiction is the genre most often associated, till recently, with narrative voices arising from the actual setting or social milieu, voices distinct from the authorial voice. It is the genre most associated with the debates about authorial intrusion, narrative distance, and narrative voice in general. Narrative voice, then, is in fact one of the most distinguishing features of the prose fiction genres today. Narrative voice is the result of the writer's artistic crafting of the narrative discourse, especially that which is not dialogue.

Narrative discourse, as defined broadly by Gerard Genette, can include all of the text in fiction, including the dialogue, since the overall mode of the prose is narrative as

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Booth's approach in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is more Aristotelian, because it recognizes most third person unfiltered narrative voice as a kind of mimetic voice distanced from the implied author through various stylistics.

opposed to dramatic. But narrative discourse, in this study, does not refer to the technical concept of narrative as *story* or a succession of events (Genette 25), which includes patterns which are not part of the actual text. This broader second concept of narrative has to do with plot (or story patterns), while narrative discourse has to do with the actual text, and the broad characteristics of the text's language. This study does not address the concept of narrative as story to any extent; however, the creative structuring and styling of narrative voices (in the first sense of *narrative*) is a major focus, because the narrative voice is a major distinguishing feature of fiction in general and of our regional fiction in particular.

Further to the point of narrative voice being genre distinctive, Frye says that "the basis of generic distinctions in literature appears to be the radical of presentation" (*Anatomy* 246-47). He elaborates on the mediums between author and audience: "The basis of generic criticism in any case is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public" (247). In this context, "poet" metonymically means the creator of literature in any genre, and "radical of presentation" refers to distinctions like "acted, spoken, and written word" (247).

He is suggesting that we can tell that something is poetry and not fiction, not by right hand margin line breaks, but by the nature of the voice and its relation to its

audience. He sees lyric poetry's radical of presentation as generally a monologic, non-dramatic, and theoretically oral delivery (restrictive parameters for some postmodern poets and critics). He describes the lyric poem's presentation as a relatively elevated unmediated authorial voice. It is a different genre than drama because drama's radical of presentation is a staged mimetic dialogue mediating the hidden voice and thematic thoughts of the author. Fiction's radical of presentation combines written dialogue with relatively unelevated narrative voice (compared to most lyric poetry), all aimed at a reading, as opposed to a listening, audience.

Likely Frye's genre distinctions need qualification in order to comfortably accommodate some postmodern poetry and fiction within his parameters; after all, he only claims them to be inductive description--not prescriptive parameters (*Anatomy* 29). However, his genre classifications do suggest that this concept of narrative voice is, almost by definition, an important genre-distinguishing feature of fiction, increasingly so in this century. Thus, the rhetoric of narrative voice could well be important in understanding the modes and thematic development of Canadian regional fiction. Of course Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Bakhtin's *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, and *The Dialogic Imagination*, all address narrative voice extensively and have garnered much attention on both sides of the Atlantic. Canadian writers and critics like Kroetsch, Wiebe, Cooley, and Sherrill Grace (see

Grace 118) have all begun to recognize the importance of analyzing the narrative voice and of discovering the origins of the voice.

Furthermore, since we already have two excellent thematic studies, one on Canadian Prairie fiction (Harrison's *Unnamed Country*, 1977) and another on Maritime fiction (Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes*, 1987), not to mention a recent provocative manifesto on poetic voice in Prairie poetry (Cooley's *The Vernacular Muse*, 1987), surely then it is time for a study of our regional fiction with a greater emphasis on the structure, style, and mode of the voices, and how these have influenced effective thematic development. Since the aesthetic rhetoric of narrative voice is distinctive to the prose genre, a study of the voices (especially narrative voices) in representative regional fiction should reveal some of the dynamics of that sense of place which is so valued in Canadian fiction.

In summary then, narrative voice, in this study, refers to the writer's creative effect on that portion of narrative discourse which is not exclusively dialogue. This includes the voices of narrative filters (first person or third person characters) and the voices of narrative agency (any narrative consciousness or perspective not belonging to one of the characters). The term *voice* is a broad metaphor that attempts to recognize the mimetic qualities of most narrative discourse in most recent fiction. Point of view and distancing between implied author, narrator, characters or readers are largely

structural decisions which, combined with the language style of the narrative, create the narrative voices and narrative strategies. Together they are a significant part of what Bakhtin calls the orchestration of voices in fiction.

Narrative *filter* and narrative *agency* are Seymour Chatman's terms and they prove to be very convenient in such a study (*Coming* 119). For example, in evaluating the narrative voices in novels like *Who Has Seen the Wind* or *The Mountain and the Valley*, it is necessary to distinguish when the author is filtering the voice through the major characters like Brian, Digby, or David Canaan, and when the voice is coming from a narrative agent that is not identifiable as a character, as in Mitchell's first seven paragraphs (*Who* 1-2) and in his last eight paragraphs (343-44). The importance of clarity in such analysis can be appreciated in the subsequent debate over Sherrill Grace's evaluation of the ending to *Who Has Seen the Wind* (in chapter two).

METHODOLOGY

The critical tools should include some principles of the rhetoric of fiction, as well as an ear cocked toward the various voices, including the vernacular voices, of these two Canadian regions. This study engages in both stylistic and thematic criticism, since the rhetorical analysis of voice is often a means to analyze and evaluate thematic development. Also, the juxtaposition of realism with idyllic impulses

encourages both stylistic and thematic analysis. The mimetic and stylized vernacular voices of Prairie and Atlantic fiction often reveal thematic insights about the actual socioeconomic and psychological milieus of these very complex regions. The language of these voices reflect various social classes, cultures, trade idioms, and the sociolinguistic diversity which contributes to a sense of place.

This does not, of course, suggest that any intelligent and articulate narrative voices found in this fiction are not dialogic and not indigenous to the setting, nor that unfiltered omniscient narration is automatically a monologic authorial voice alien from the social milieu of the setting. This is the worst kind of reductionism sometimes done in the name of Bakhtinian analysis, much to the denigration of Bakhtin. This kind of fallacious criticism exemplified by Sherrill Grace's evaluation of Mitchell's unfiltered omniscient narration (Grace 125-26) is one of the reasons for delving into the methodology and aesthetics of Bakhtin's theories on dialogic voice.

However, the primary reasons for employing Bakhtin's complex and sometimes controversial concepts of dialogic voice are related to the origin of the voices in this fiction; they come from an increasing variety of social strata and from formerly silenced (or unrecognized) linguistic idioms, which are forcing themselves onto centre stage both in regional fiction and in regional poetry. Few critical theories address

this phenomenon so cogently as Bakhtin's theory of dialogic voice in *The Dialogic Imagination* (271). Cooley's *The Vernacular Muse* posits the ascent of a Western Canadian Vulgate (167-214) made up of such vital new vernacular idioms that are, he claims, revolutionizing Canadian Prairie poetry. While not attempting any purely linguistic analysis of such "voices," this present study suggests that such dialogized voices develop a sense of place beyond mere landscape description. Such voices are rich with social, economic, cultural, and geographical imprints upon the language, which immerse and educate the reader in the dynamics of the sociolinguistic milieu that shapes the characters and the conflicts.

So Bakhtin and Cooley would answer the question of "Where is this voice coming from?" in similar ways. Bakhtin suggests that the voice through which sense of place is discovered most effectively is not the diegetic voice of the author, but the largely mimetic voice or voices of the narrator (and of other characters) which arise out of the actual social milieu that inspires the setting. He argues that these voices should be orchestrated by the author, and that when fiction is working well,

> the social and historical voices populating language . . . are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch. (*Dialogic* 300)

Bakhtin claims that fiction's centrifugal power to challenge

the established language and culture lies in the author's ability to orchestrate the creative voices from the various dynamic idioms arising from the actual landscape and the actual social milieu, although he makes it clear that these can not be literally and orally mimetic. For example, which diction is mimetic and which is stylized when a narrative voice filters the thought patterns of a character? In the following passage, Bakhtin clarifies this and states his vision of the critical agenda in more idiosyncratic terms, but terms which are rapidly flooding the language of postmodern criticism:

> What *is* present in the novel is an artistic *system* of languages, or more accurately a system of *images* of languages, and the real task of stylistic analysis consists in uncovering all available orchestrating languages in the composition of the novel, grasping the precise degree of distancing that separates each language from its most immediate semantic instantiation in the work . . . understanding their dialogic interrelationships, and--finally--if there is direct authorial discourse, determining the heteroglot background outside the work that dialogizes it. (416)

Bakhtin is using "authorial discourse" to mean unfiltered third person narration. "Orchestrating languages" refers to the interplay between different idioms, dialects, accents, and trade vernaculars (usually of the same language) created by various forms of sociolinguistic conditioning within the cultural milieu from which the fiction originates. He is not always careful to distinguish between narratological concepts by using conventional terms; Seymour Chatman (*Coming to Terms*) and Gerard Genette (*Narrative Discourse*), two theorists on

narrative discourse, are more consistent and aware of the significance and history of such terms.

This study makes frequent use of Bakhtin's critical method involving the distinctions of dialogic and monologic discourse, placing this method within the larger context of rhetoric and narratology as practised by Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Thus, analysis of voice will not be limited to Bakhtin's method, nor will his complex and idiosyncratic terminology dominate the critical diction. However, the aim is to examine not only the internal rhetoric or "aesthetic rhetoric" (Chatman, *Coming* 189) of the discourse, but also the external rhetoric, or "ideological rhetoric" (Chatman 189), including both the philosophical slant of the work and its sociocultural roots. The internal rhetoric involves the aesthetic coherence of all the author's creative manipulation of discourse (the poetics); the external rhetoric involves the world outside the text, including where the fiction originates (the real world roots of the vision and the voice), as well as where it is aimed (the intended effect on the reader and on society). This last aspect, the fiction's ideological direction, Chatman calls "the slant" (143).

In summary, this methodology does not exclusively emphasize thematic directions, nor does it just address narrow linguistic aspects of the text. This study does examine the narrative strategies and styles, and their role in developing effective modes and themes. It also examines the sociological

roots and sociolinguistic distinctiveness of the voices, especially as they create the dialectic between the local idyllic impulses and a darker mimetic realism, which contributes to a distinctive regional sense of place.

THE MATURATION OF CRITICISM TOWARD REGIONAL FICTION

The critical response to good regional fiction has not always been positive, even in the cases of the strongest novels by respected writers like Buckler and Mitchell. A primary focus of critical debate concerns the liberties taken by these two authors in the narrative strategies and styles of *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Mountain and the Valley*. Even as Grace more recently criticizes Mitchell's closing narrative for employing "a kind of transcendental unitary perspective" (Grace 126), so have several critics in the past castigated these writers' description of landscape as excessive and overly pastoral. These criticisms can be partially explained as a failure to understand the narrative voice strategies in the juxtaposition of mimetic realism with the idyllic, both in the landscapes and in their characters.

One reason for surveying the critical reactions to Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod is to show how some critics loathed the appearance of pastoral impulses in any form within realistic fiction, and how this limited their appreciation of the successful and evolving mode of dialectical realism featured in this study. Their criticism attempted to limit

the range of genuinely creative responses to our literary history, particularly in responses to the regional idyll in Canadian fiction and poetry. This study argues that the idyllic notions and impulses of the local cultures (reflected by idealized types in popular regional literature) are significant repositories of community and cultural ideals and values (which influence both fortunate and unfortunate realities); therefore, these idyllic notions and their effects on society are potential and important subjects for realistic fiction.

Northrop Frye's *The Secular Scriptures* points out the important roles of romance and idyll in a culture's literature. In the essay concluding the *Literary History of Canada*, Frye writes "At the heart of all social mythology lies . . . a pastoral myth, the vision of a social ideal" (*Bush* 238). He goes on to summarize his point:

> We have found the pastoral myth, in its popular and sentimental form, to be an idealization of memory, especially childhood memory. But we have also suggested that the same myth exists in a genuinely imaginative form, and have found its influence in some of the best Canadian writers. (241)

This study points out some of the unsentimental uses of pastoral impulses in a "genuinely imaginative form" (dialectical realism) in the best fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod. I argue that this is a distinctively regional (and distinctively Canadian) literary development.

Eli Mandel, addressing the same search for our "genuine cultural history" in the introduction to *Contexts of Canadian*

Criticism, suggests that "The shape of a pastoral emerges in biblical parallels and images in Canadian poetry (a myth of city, garden, wilderness) and in the figures of wanderers, voyageurs, boatmen" (19). This study argues that the "myths" of wilderness, wanderers, voyageurs, and other primitivism also emerge from the local idylls and the popular culture in the Canadian regions and are exploited in dialectical realism.

While most mid-century critics would have agreed with Frye's thesis in *The Secular Scripture*, many believed that the only myth, romance, or idyll important to our new world culture was to be found in the Bible, classical mythology, or other canonized writing that was obviously conscious of these pillars of myth. E. K. Brown, for example, wrote that regionalism, because of its historical connection with pastoral and idyllic literature, is "another force that tells against the immediate growth of a national literature" (23). His conclusion to this problem of regionalism is as follows:

> in the end . . . regionalist art will fail because it stresses the superficial and the peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion of the fundamental and universal. The advent of regionalism may be welcomed with reservations as a stage through which it may be well for us to pass, as a discipline and a purgation. But if we are to pass through it, the coming of great books will be delayed beyond the lifetime of anyone now living. (25)

It has been over fifty years now since he wrote that, and students of Canadian literature seldom cower beneath such opinions now. After all, many people of that time lived to read Margaret Laurence's *Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*.

Nevertheless, many other critics held similar attitudes toward Canadian literature and toward regional Canadian literature in particular, but their numbers and voices declined as the century matured. Still, even in 1971, Ronald Sutherland in *Second Image* argued his "twin solitude" theory inferring that great Canadian literature should address national topics in an effort to "define nationality" (1). But to many readers, the "twin solitudes" of upper and lower Canada seemed to be the only histories, cultures, and experiences that qualified as subject matter for the "mainstream" or canon of a national literature, according to Sutherland. Needless to say, anyone from Joseph Howe to Harold Horwood to Rudy Wiebe to Joy Kogawa would not have measured up. By 1977 Sutherland felt the need to respond to the negative reaction to his "mainstream" thesis, and in *The New Hero* he makes room for writers like Ross, Laurence, and W.O. Mitchell in the "sidestreams" (93), arguing that "the mainstream concept is a thematic identification and not a value judgement" (94).

By 1977 and especially since then, many critics recognized the limitations of the position of some high modernists which elevated only that literature recognized by the great cultural centres of empires, like New York, London, Paris, and (in the case of Canada) Montreal and Toronto. The voices like E.K. Brown's that bolstered the pejorative connotations of adjectives like *regional* and *provincial* seem

to be supporting what Bakhtin calls the centripetal forces of language and elite cultural hegemony which attempt to either contain or ignore the centrifugal and more democratic forces within the dialogized language of dynamic fiction.

Modernist critics like E.K. Brown and Desmond Pacey were reacting to our Canadian writers' late entry into the modes of realism and modernism. MacLulich traces this self-conscious critical reaction at least as far back as A.J.M. Smith's confrontational, landmark article in *Canadian Forum* (April 1928), which castigates the Canadian Authors Association for succumbing to the demands for idealistic fiction from the popular press media. He calls for more mimetic realism as a first step toward a Canadian modernism, which to him was no where in sight (MacLulich 97).

Smith, Brown, and company were no doubt reacting to the popularity of writers like Ralph Connor, L.M. Montgomery, Nellie McClung and Robert Service who found it expedient to mix a bit of romance or regional idyll with their realism. However, by the time of Smith's article, at least three novels, Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, and Stead's *Grain* were already challenging the nostalgic and idealistic versions of prairie landscape and lifestyle common to the prairie idylls. Grove's *Our Daily Bread* (1928), Frank P. Day's *Rockbound* (1928), and Knister's *White Narcissus* (1929) joined the earlier three novels in what MacLulich calls a deliberate challenge to the "optimistic

falsification of experience that was the stock-in-trade of the popular writers such as Ralph Connor and L.M. Montgomery" (99).

This was surely the beginnings of Canadian realism with Canadian roots: first in the landscape emphasis (which they held in common with the regional idyll), and secondly in a new democratic appeal to common characters, common middle class diction, and to working class experience. This fiction was perhaps more conservative in form than Faulkner's, and less fashionable than Callaghan's adaptation of Hemingway's objective style, but their fiction had about it the rough authentic marks of the physical and the ideological Canadian landscape as surely as did the art of Tom Thompson or Emily Carr.

It is widely agreed that these writers laid the groundwork for the full blown modernism of Ross, Roy, Watson, Wiseman, Mitchell and Buckler. However, there has often been a mistrust among the academic critics of the comic realism of Mitchell, as opposed to the tragic realism of Ross. Harrison argues that "the ascendency of the tragic view of Prairie life outlined by Grove and Ross has been largely the work of critics and the academic community over the past thirty years" (W.O. 145). He does not imply that these two did not deserve that work, but that "the central `tradition' of Prairie fiction, then, has been academically and narrowly defined" (W.O. 145). Harrison speculates about the ten year virtual

silence by the critics toward Mitchell, during the sixties, by declaring that "it can only be assumed that critics underestimated Mitchell's work . . . possibly because it does not belong to the mode of Realism which commanded literary attention at mid-century" (W.O. 151).

Some critics have also mistrusted any realism that tried to incorporate landscape description that bore any similarity to that of the regional idyll. Both *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Mountain and the Valley* offended some modernist critics because of supposed flirtation with idyllic landscape and with nostalgic pastoral traditions. This was compounded by subsequent publications like the *Jake and the Kid* stories and *Ox Bells and Fireflies* which clearly used certain conventions of the regional idyll.

The contention of this study is that the early critics' zeal for ridding Canadian literature of the idyllic in favour of realism blinded some of them to Mitchell's and Buckler's contributions to an authentic home-grown Canadian mode of dialectical realism that juxtaposes regional idyllic impulses (the romantic ideals of one's own locale) against mimetic realism. This is a different approach to modernism than that which subjects the realism to greater structuring myths exclusively from the Bible or classical mythology (like Watson's *The Double Hook* or Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*).

Thus, MacLulich by 1988 dares to argue that while "the arrival of modernism is an important chapter in the

development of our fiction . . . it is far from being the whole story" (65). He argues that, "The upsurge of regional fiction that appeared at the turn of the century also played an important role in laying the groundwork of a native literary tradition" (65). He admits that "most of the regional idylls are undistinguished" (65), but he asserts that they did provide some early rudiments of a tradition that was to continue to the present. He argues this claim on two fronts: one, that the appearance of some popular writers like Connor, Montgomery, and McClung "represents an important and salutary shift in the social affiliation of our literature" (11) towards more North American, democratic, and common values as opposed to the "aristocratic view of literature" (10) that was more prevalent in Canada than in America at the turn of the century; secondly, that landscape and "local colour" aspects of the regional idylls had an influence on the way the best emerging Canadian writers of modern fiction handled their regional landscape (MacLulich 99).

In effect, the argument is that some of the Canadian regional writers at the turn of the century democratized fiction by writing in a more vernacular style and by characterizing common Canadians. Also, they focused on the regional landscape in distinctive ways, preparing the way for a greater more consummate art that provided an authentic and vital identity to our emerging modern fiction.

The present study takes a similar but slightly different

approach from MacLulich's to argue that the local idyllic impulses, especially from the popular folk cultures and from certain regional "myths" (many of which are reflected incidently in the regional idylls) act as one important repository of common community ideals and values, much like Frye's concept of the "secular scriptures," but different in many particulars from the biblical and classical mythology of traditional Western culture. Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod use this repository to develop one pole of the dialectical conflict between their characters' ideals and their socioeconomic realities. Their mode of dialectical realism is also marked by an increasing dialogism and sophistication in the narrative voices of this fiction.

The maturing critical reaction to Mitchell, Buckler, and, more recently, MacLeod signals an increasing tolerance of realistic modes significantly different from those of Sinclair Ross, Alice Munro, David Adams Richards, and Guy Vanderhaeghe. The dialectical mode of Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod is certainly not aesthetically superior, in any intrinsic sense, to the modes of Ross, Vanderhaeghe, or Richards, but it does possibly require broader reading strategies. Both modes continue to be important in Canadian contemporary fiction.

The motivating ideas behind dialectical realism have some interesting parallels to a concept Frye attributes to Matthew Arnold; that is, "that we live in two environments, an actual social one and an ideal one" (Frye, *Educated* 66). Arnold

thought of this ideal environment as Culture with a capital "C"; however, the fiction of MacLeod, Mitchell and Buckler juxtaposes an actual social environment with an ideal one that is less restrictive and canonical than Arnold's idea of culture. Their characters' notions of "ideal" environments are influenced by local idyll, regional myth, popular culture, and sometimes even by some of Arnold's (capital "C") Culture, while the juxtaposed realism of the social environment includes the socioeconomic and geographic realities of rural Nova Scotia or dust-bowl Saskatchewan.

No doubt if these writers had structured their dialectic with Arnold's version of Culture as the "ideal" pole juxtaposed against realism, the more European oriented critics of mid-twentieth century Canada would have viewed their work more sympathetically. Still, the fiction of these three writers celebrates the duality and the conflicts of the real and ideal environments of their regions, and from this dialectic they have forged an identifiable Canadian product that is indeed part of "the best that has been thought and said."

CLASSICAL PASTORAL VERSUS CANADIAN IDYLL

It is important to distinguish between the actual genre forms of pastoral, idyll, or romance and this dialectical realism that merely makes good use of idyllic impulses (ultimately toward the ends of mimetic realism). The regional

idyll popular in Canada around the turn of the century is, on the other hand, often an unselfconscious mixture of mimetic and romantic modes, featuring both realistic and idyllic impulses. So let us review the scope and some of the various elements of idyll.

The idyll is characterized historically by idealization or valorization of at least some of the following: particular types of landscape, primitivism (see Cudden 743-46), childhood or child-like innocence, traditional gender roles, and nostalgia for mores and values of the past or for simple rural mores. Idyllic art of any kind often includes a projection of moral, spiritual, or aesthetic order upon a natural world. Idyllic character types include any idealized types, like the innocent rustic and the edenic child untouched by the Fall. For example, Ross Annett's *Especially Babe* stories, which no doubt influenced Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid* stories, take on the darkness of the prairie depression with characters that are often romanticized types. It does not require sophisticated aesthetic or moral judgement to appreciate their roles. The reader does not hesitate to sympathize with the amoral rustic hiding his lethal moonshine from the Mounties. The child, Babe, is an angelic ideal always protected, almost miraculously, from the alcoholism, abuse, and psychological terrors of the dust bowl reality.

Frye defines idyll in some comments on comic fictional modes by saying "The mode of romantic comedy . . . is best

described as idyllic, and its chief vehicle is the pastoral" (*Anatomy* 43). He goes on to say,

> the idyllic . . . preserves the theme of escape from society to the extent of idealizing a simplified life in the country or on the frontier (the pastoral of popular modern literature is the Western story). (Anatomy 43)

Frye, along with most handbooks and dictionaries of literary terms, has much more to say about the pastoral than the idyllic. J. A. Cuddon sums up his brief but thorough history of the pastoral with the following generalization about pastoral themes, which is broad enough to define almost the full range of idyllic themes as well:

> The dominating idea and theme of most pastoral is the search for the simple life. . . . In a way it reveals a yearning for a lost innocence, a pre-Fall paradisal life in which man existed in harmony with nature. It is thus a form of primitivism (q.v) and a potent longing for things past. (689)

While the pastoral is perhaps the most common form of the idyll, one notes that even the derivation of the term should tell us that the Greek pastoral has different characteristics from the Canadian Prairie idyll. Shepherds, poets, nymphs, satyrs, and mead reflect different social and aesthetic ideals from those reflected by stoically enduring farm-wives, church potlucks, and Wheat Pool or Coop grain elevators. The rural idyllic notions of the British, (shepherds, milkmaids, rustic servants, and stonewall-fenced fields) might well be termed *pastoral*, with the original connotations of *shepherd* and *pasture*, but the idyllic notions of Newfoundland's outport citizens, on the other hand, would not necessarily reflect

neat agrarian fields nor similar ideals. The idyllic impulses of Newfoundland are also profoundly different than the civilized pastoral strains of *Anne of Green Gables.* The glorification of the harsher wilderness and seascape in Newfoundland's fiction is not *pastoral* in the tradition of the pastoral visions of Prince Edward Island or Scotland; Newfoundland's idylls have more in common with primitivism of the "untamed" and "uncompromising" wilderness landscapes of the Rockies, the Canadian North, and the original "virgin" prairie.

The point is that many Canadian idyllic impulses are unique in that they do not correspond directly to the Old World bucolic types of man-nurtured gardens, Edens, or "pastoral" landscape in the narrow etymological sense of shepherds and pasture. Many idyllic concepts here are of mixed ancestry, while some are part of new Canadian regional idylls that are often generalized as regional "myth," a convenient but technically debatable term. In such myths, romanticized habitant, courier de bois, mountain men, trappers, "mushers," the noble savage, and aboriginals with preternatural powers are all idyllic types, but only the habitant comes close to the classical bucolic pastoralism. Certainly, most Canadian regional idylls exhibit points of contact with Theocritus, Virgil, Sidney, Spenser, and Milton; nevertheless, it is the differences that are important in understanding the new identity and authenticity created by the

inclusion of Canadian idyllic impulses. After all, novels, like *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *Tay John*, as well as short stories like O'Hagan's "The Bride's Crossing," Mowat's "The Iron Men," and Ken Mitchell's "The Great Electrical Revolution" all use established local idyllic notions in dialectic with basically mimetic recreations of the socio-economic landscape to sharpen the insights of their realism.

Western, Prairie, and Northern idyllic impulses and types often have more in common with idyll invoked by romancers like Robert Service and Jack London than with the pastorals of Lucy Maud Montgomery. She plays on bucolic notions of Edenic landscape and social convention, while Service and London use the idyllic notions of wilderness as sentient, all powerful, never benign, often personified, but always glorified. Idyllic notions of wilderness in the western and northern regions (including Newfoundland) often idealize wilderness as challenging social conventions and social control, as in the domesticated dog returning to nature in London's *Call of the Wild*. This idyllic version of wilderness often judges between the "worthy" and the "unworthy" in a type of Canadian primitivism. Notice how Rudy Wiebe, in *The Mad Trapper*, establishes a mode of realism in his historical fiction that plays against the similar notions of wilderness idyll embodied in the public myth of Albert Johnson. The same could be said for his characters of Big Bear, Riel, and Dumont: his realism acts dialectically, to a large extent, with the popular

idyllic and primitivist glorification of these characters.

Much of the debate as to whether Mitchell's prairie, in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, evokes essentially a dark naturalistic vision or a transcendental vision of the landscape could be analyzed profitably in reference to the Western Canadian idyllic notions of wilderness. Mitchell works a dialectic between the popular idyllic concepts of wilderness (powerful, primordial, yet glorified, almost deified, having "no truck" with the shallow social conventions or mores of man), and a more realistic vision of prairie that includes the genetic terror of the two headed calf and the decomposition of the mutilated gopher.

The idyllic impulses about prairie that figure in Mitchell's dialectic are not just the pastoral ones of stooks, grain elevators, and sunsets of popular prairie art. Mitchell's prairie often has more in common with O'Hagan's wilderness, Horwood's Newfoundland, and Frank Parker Day's Atlantic, than with Lucy Maude Montgomery's garden. The following chapter explores, among other things, how Mitchell's dialectic between mimetic realism and idyllic impulses exploits the local and popular myths of wilderness as well as the traditional European pastoral ideals.

PASTORAL MODES VERSUS DIALECTICAL REALISM

First however, it is worth noting that there is a

continuum between fiction in the idyllic mode--usually associated with romance genres--and fiction in the realistic modes where the author is aware of, and consciously uses, the idyllic impulses mainly in juxtaposition to emphasize the realism. This continuum might best be illustrated by two examples that are both close to the ill-defined borders of Canadian regional idyll and realism.

Ross Annett's *Especially Babe* stories deploy a powerful primitivist wilderness in conflict with the social order (banks, Mounties, social decorum). One of the most memorable scenes involves a tractor which is to be seized on account of bad debt. It is hidden by the wind, buried in the drifting blow dirt, and uncovered partially by that same wind when the danger of foreclosure is gone (17-18). This is wilderness idyll. The innocent rustic--Big Joe, and the angelic miraculously protected child--Babe, these are traditionally idyllic characters, though the narrative voice is not of the elevated diction and style of nineteenth-century pastoralism.

Annett's fiction is much more sophisticated and aesthetically serious than television's comic romances like the *Beverly Hillbillies*, but his short stories are of a mixed genre, idyll broadly mixed with realism, or the reverse, some might argue. Although the stories exhibit elements of realism, more than in most *Jake and the Kid* stories, Annett's dominant mode is prairie idyll. Nevertheless, the aesthetic value needs to be judged carefully: probably not in comparison

with modern tragic realism, nor in comparison with pure comic romance.

On the other hand, Ralph Allen's *Peace River Country*, which Harrison classifies as comic realism (*Unnamed* 164), is further along the continuum from the idyllic toward realism, in a mode that self-consciously uses the idyllic impulses in dialectic with mimetic realism. The connotations of the title, *Peace River Country*, were well known in the depression: a land of milk and honey, where the dust never blew, where land was rich but available, where bumper crops and neighbourly communities aided a man in search of peace. The title is ironic and so is the mode, because somewhere along the way in the novel the reader realizes that the dream of reaching this utopia is as much illusion as the card tricks, confidence scams, and false dreams of Mr. Sondern, another victim of the dust-bowl. The daydreams and fantasy victories of Kally, his daughter, are juxtaposed against the agonizing inability of his son, Harold, to play the game, to attain the Eden of the mind. He struggles to remain innocent, despite the irony of his final ability to humour his dying father and his last card trick (Allen 218). There are a few minor comic plot manipulations, like winning the prize at the county fair, and Mr. Chatworth's day in court, but overall Allen self-consciously controls the narrative with the illusory world of idyll juxtaposed against the economic and spiritual poverty, and against Harold's wrenching loss of innocence.

When Frye says that "we have found the pastoral myth, in its popular and sentimental social form, to be an idealization of memory, especially childhood memory" (*Bush* 241), one understands that this could refer, in part at least, to certain aspects of *Especially Babe* and *Jake and the Kid*. Aesthetically, these should be judged against other hybrids of realism and "tall tales" (see O.S. Mitchell 16)--certainly not against the ironic realism of Munro or Vanderhaeghe. Frye follows that definition of the idyllic genre with, "But we have also suggested that the same myth exists in a genuinely imaginative form, and have found its influence in some of the best Canadian writers" (241). This could well be related to fiction like *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *The Mountain and the Valley*, perhaps even Allen's *Peace River Country*--fiction that responds consciously to idyllic impulses for a definite effect, but remains firmly within the genre of modern realism.

Frye separates the genre of regional idyll from that realism which recognizes pastoral impulses and uses them in a "genuinely imaginative form" (241). He calls the first category "sentimental or nostalgic pastoral myth" which draws "the subject into a fantasy world" (241). He juxtaposes this immediately with his version of the second category: "the genuine myth, then, would result from reversing this process" (242), in other words, from consciously revealing the gulf between idyll and realism.

Admittedly, Frye is probably characterizing all regional

practitioners of the genres of romance, idyll, and hybrids of romance and realism as not genuinely creative or genuinely imaginative. That is possibly true about most of our regional idylls, but most certainly all of our early regional fiction should not be summarily dismissed aesthetically or culturally. After all, Frye, in *The Secular Scriptures*, reminds us of the importance of romance and myth to our literature and culture, and he was one of the first Canadian critics to emphasize the extra-aesthetic values of even our immature regional literature. He emphasized the social, cultural, and historical roles of Canadian literature in "Conclusions" to Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*, suggesting that the idyllic themes related to a "social imagination" (Frye, Bush 215) which has its "own rhythms of growth as well as its own modes of expression" (215).

This "social imagination" is roughly equivalent to what this study refers to, when it suggests that the regional idylls reflect a repository of community and social ideals. Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod draw on this repository (this regional "social imagination") to document one pole of their dialectical realism. That is why this study is calling for broader reading strategies to appreciate the roles of different modes and hybrid genres in developing our culture and our literature.

To put this dialectical realism in perspective, one must recognize that more than one commentator on pastoral modes has

suggested that even the more sophisticated pastorals tacitly contrast their idealizations with the understood complexities and harshness of reality. For example, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* suggests the following:

> The pastoral mode is self-reflexive. Typically, the poet echoes the conventions of earlier pastorals in order to put the "complex into the simple," as William Epson observed in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935). The poem is not really about shepherds but about the complex society the poet and readers inhabit. (Frye, Baker and Perkins 339)

An implicit dialectic with realism within the pastoral mode is also suggested by Marinelli in *Pastoral*. He argues that the Third Century romance, *Daphnis and Cloe*, by Longus, is the "earliest form of the pastoral novel" (75), and that,

> The novel is astonishing for the equilibrium it maintains between the freshness and beauty of the pastoral world and the sense of its fragility and finally of its insufficiency. Nostalgia and wisdom go hand in hand, and the fusion of the two produces a marvellous good humour that lightens from every page. (77)

Marinelli suggests that this fusion is typical of the best pastoral tradition. Thus, what we witness in Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod is an ancient dialectical strategy, but a strategy wielded within a realistic mode rather than a pastoral one, with different idyllic impulses juxtaposed against different social and geographic realities to synthesize a distinctive dialectical realism.

So the call for broader reading strategies is prompted by the intolerant critical mood of the academic critics throughout the middle decades of Twentieth Century Canadian

criticism, when many were embarrassed by Canada's conservative and retarded movement into modern realism in fiction. Critics seemed unaware that a Canadian literary identity, including regional mythologies, could be forged out of the fictional works that were being published, mature and immature alike. They seemed much too busy trying to force the literature into a European mould before it had matured into its own. Today publishers like Tree Frog Press in Edmonton are reissuing fiction such as Annett's *Especially Babe* in defiance of the crippling straight-jacket effect of those critics who recognized only one mode of modern realism to be genuinely imaginative fiction.

So together in arms with Booth and Cooley, this study tries to respond to our unique literary history with "broader reading strategies." It approaches the best fiction of these regional authors through analysis of the voices, especially narrative voices. It attempts to show how these voices are increasingly dialogic and distinctive, arising from the actual sociolinguistic milieu of the region. It examines how a unique sense of place is sometimes synthesized through a mode of dialectical realism, because the voices are chronicling regional traditions from both idyll and realism.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

Chapter 2 W.O. MITCHELL: VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

Part 1: ON *WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND*

MIXED MODES AND MIXED REACTIONS

I have already implied that Mitchell's place in Canadian fiction has been established rather slowly and almost nervously by the academic community. A rough consensus has emerged in the last twenty-five years on the value of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and secondly, on *The Vanishing Point*, but the praise is by no means unanimous. This is partially due to the historical narrowness of some Canadian literary criticism, especially in the middle decades of the twentieth century. This chapter argues that broader reading strategies might help, and indeed have helped, to allay the critical hesitation. These reading strategies include greater sensitivity to Mitchell's genre-forms, to his creative mixture of modes (comic and tragic), and to his juxtaposition of realism with idyllic impulses.

Harrison summarizes the history of critical hesitation by pointing out that "Mitchell, as a writer of comedy, did not project the tragic view of humanity's alienation from the land which characterizes Prairie Realism" (W.O. 144). In *Unnamed Country*, Harrison presents Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* as the culmination of the comic tradition of realism (165), as opposed to the "dark" or tragic tradition of Prairie Realism

represented notably by Ross and Grove. He articulates a solution to the critical uncertainty that has not often been examined: "Obviously we can not go on trying to appropriate Mitchell to the `dark' tradition simply because he is a `serious' artist" (*Unnamed* 155).

His solution to the critical uneasiness is a direct and compelling one that fits well with the arguments of T. D. MacLulich about the historical influence of the regional idyll on Canadian modernist fiction. While Harrison focuses on the influence of a comic mode in prairie fiction, MacLulich focuses on the somewhat parallel influence of the idyllic. While the idyll proper usually belongs to the mode of romantic comedy (Frye, *Anatomy* 43), the Canadian regional idyll is a comic mode that mixes ideal and mimetic elements. Harrison documents the history in prairie fiction of a comic mode (part realism, part romance) that he calls "popular in the sense that [it does] not seriously challenge popular values either literary or moral" (*Unnamed* 156). Popular values, both aesthetically and ethically, are a common part of the regional idyll, so one can appreciate the similarities in the genre-distinguishing, historical approaches of these two critics.

Harrison's appeal for discrimination of mode and genre-form addresses much of the previous tension in the critical debate about Mitchell's work. The appeal implies that Mitchell's major novels should generally be read as serious comic realism, while *the Jake and the Kid* stories might be

read more generously as tales leaning toward idyll (or comic romance) except for a few of the later stories that include more complex aspects of comic realism.

Of all the Mitchell novels, *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* is the only one which Harrison hesitates to categorize as comic realism due to its darker shattering of innocence. However, *Who Has Seen the Wind* also proves to be rather enigmatic when it comes to classification of mode, even though it might well be, in many ways, a climax to the comic realist tradition in Prairie fiction, as documented by Harrison in *Unnamed Country*. Yet from Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow" (1960) to Blodgett's "Gone West to Geometry's Country" (*Configuration* 1982), a minority of critics have recognized, to one degree or another, the darker side of the novel, like Brian's loss of innocence, and the ultimate "emphasis on the finality of death" (Harrison, W.O. 167).

Tallman suggests that the attempt at intertwining a comic mode with a tragic vision destroys the proper effect of the devastating isolation and alienation of the prairie and the town (Tallman 236). Though Tallman's thesis, on isolation and alienation of European Man from the wolf of the North American landscape, does not fit the actual tone and thematic development of this novel, still he and Blodgett do identify genuinely tragic elements in the boy's development and in the prairie episodes which seem to be in opposition to the comic mode of the developing conflicts in the town.

Blodgett, while admitting Harrison's point that "the bulk of the novel belongs to a tradition of . . . comic realism" (Blodgett 201), raises the question of "whether Mitchell, the apocalyptic novelist, consorts well with his other half" (201), that half being reflected in his comic mode. Harrison, while debating Blodgett's specific interpretation of the climax, agrees that the novel "retains its potentially tragic overtones to the end" (W.O. 168). Furthermore, Harrison suggests that he probably went too far in *Unnamed Country*, by interpreting the comic resolution to mean that "man was never seriously alienated from his natural environment" (W.O. 165). The debate just further establishes the enigmatic nature of the theme and of the entwined modes.

This study agrees with a compromise position that tragicomic realism might be a better description of this novel's mode. Careful examination of the structure and style of the voices establishes that Mitchell successfully develops, in several of his best novels, a dialectical mode that juxtaposes mimetic realism with certain idyllic impulses discussed in the previous chapter. Conversely, his failure to follow through with a thorough juxtaposition in some later novels, like *Roses Are Difficult Here*, compromises the success of his mode. But his prototype and classic example of this dialectical mode is *Who has Seen the Wind*; its style and structure have been the objects of debates predating its publication and continuing even to the present moment.

TWO VERSIONS OF *WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND*

W.O. Mitchell has stated publicly in interviews on C.B.C. radio and television that the editor of the first American edition of *Who Has Seen the Wind* is partially responsible for some of the critics' charges concerning caricature (Moss, *Reader's 204)*, and concerning idealistic characterization. Many serious students of Canadian Literature are now at least vaguely aware of the tale of two versions described here by Barbara Mitchell:

> In 1947 two significantly different versions of *Who Has Seen the Wind* were published. Little, Brown & Co. published an edition that was approximately 7,000 words shorter than that released simultaneously by The Macmillan Company of Canada. . . . [T]he author himself . . . was unaware that all subsequent editions of *Wind* have used the American version rather than the Canadian. (8)

Since this was written, McClelland and Stewart have released an edition with the longer original text, but for years only the shorter one was readily available. Edward Weeks, editor of *Atlantic Monthly*, was the man responsible for the revisions, and according to Barbara Mitchell's account, a nine month correspondence battle ensued between Weeks on one hand, and Mitchell and Professor F.M. Salter--Mitchell's mentor, former instructor (University of Alberta), and personal advisor on the novel (9). Mitchell won back about 2000 words of the 9000 originally demanded by Weeks; some significant passages retrieved from the cutting floor included the often quoted opening line, the final eight paragraphs, a climactic passage containing Brian's sleepover in the straw stack during

his father's death, and numerous passages building the wind motif (12-13). Weeks wanted the wind motif to be deleted entirely and this became the central fight for Mitchell. He managed to retain the crucial passages, although Barbara Mitchell claims that "in addition to the wind passages some thirty landscape descriptions were cut. Weeks tended to remove those of a less pleasant-sounding nature" (12).

There are two major points here important to this study: the first is the thematic significance of the actual and the intended cuts, and this is articulately stated by Barbara Mitchell; the second has not been noted in published criticism, that the majority of actual and proposed cuts were unfiltered omniscient narration where the narrative agent is not reflecting the consciousness of any character (as in the opening paragraphs and the final eight paragraphs). The significance of this bias needs to be highlighted.

About the thematic significance, Barbara Mitchell says,

> Concordant with the wind motif is the interplay of light and dark including references to clouds, shadows, lightning, and Northern Lights all reflecting Brian's "fleeting revelations." To remove any substantial number of these motifs, as Weeks proposed, would disrupt the contrapuntal effect, the balancing of dualities of light *and* dark, birth *and* death, caressing *and* avenging wind, human *and* prairie voice, insight *and* incomprehension. (13)

Her italics on those conjunctions throws the emphasis to the final counterparts which all emphasize a darker more realistic vision in dialectic with the first counterparts, which, if they stood alone, could possibly be interpreted as supporting

an idyllic vision of the prairie.

The second point about Weeks's urge to cut out most of the unfiltered omniscient narration is a bit more complex. Weeks is an editor of an aesthetically trend setting magazine (in the domain of fiction) in 1945. A critical movement against any omniscient unfiltered narration that could be construed as "authorial intrusion" had filtered down from the literary academy to firmly entrench itself in the editorial philosophy of *The New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly,* and other prestigious magazines. Under this rather mechanical theory of editing, filtered omniscience, as well as any camera-eye or relatively objective omniscience, is permitted, but when omniscient narration begins to interpret, or wax eloquent (without a character filter) about landscape, then it has to be cut. This overly simplistic theory was employed to create a "tighter" narrative for *Who Has Seen the Wind,* but overall, if it had not been challenged by Mitchell, it would have emasculated the aesthetic rhetoric that orchestrates the narrative voices and compromised the novel's ideological rhetoric.

A few of these passages that were either cut or scheduled for cutting are instructive as to the weaknesses of this simplistic editing method. For example the opening line is an unfiltered omniscient voice, but it uses the perspective and language, not of an omniscient god-like consciousness, but of a prairie high school mathematics and science teacher like

Digby. "Least common denominator" and "skeleton requirements" are phrases and concepts that thoroughly anthropomorphize the omniscience, and that is exactly what makes this voice dialogic rather than monologic. The voice reflects educated, rational, prairie man attempting to take the measure of a landscape that includes himself yet is distanced from him by his own reasoning and language. The theme of man set apart from nature by reason recurs frequently in the novel, but in the next section of this chapter I continue to argue that this theme is not developed by authorial intrusion.

In the same paragraph the narrative voice changes and dialogizes dialectically when it initiates the wind motif:

> waiting for the unfailing visitation of the wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long, hot gusting that would lift the black top soil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads or in deep banks against the fences. (1)

Here we have the language and concepts of the prairie philosopher and secular theologian (like Digby, the school teacher), stoking the Greek and Hebrew connotations of "wind" with "unfailing visitation" and with "stroking . . . giving them life." Then he juxtaposes (with that semicolon) these rather idyllic notions against the "long, hot gusting" wind that mercilessly erodes the life-giving topsoil and uses it to bury fences and roads of man's devising. Already, the voices are in a dialectic raising that exclusively anthropocentric dilemma, the theological conundrum of an all good, all powerful deity, destroying pastoral perfection for no apparent

reason. This thematic strand also continues throughout the novel.

The novel's second paragraph, cut from the shorter editions, might well obviate the need for the preface (for a careful reader) if the connotations are noted. Two similes here set up the child-type perception, which is part of the unfiltered omniscient narration, but this perception is quite a contrast to the cognitive level of that opening line and to the tone of the "hot gusting" passage. These similes create a single biblical personification as follows: "as though a magnificent breath were being held," and the cloud is described as having "blown cheeks and extended lips like the wind personification upon an old map" (1). The wind, compared to "magnificent breath" held back, is fortified by the further personification. This suggests the biblical linguistic connections between concepts of wind, breath, inspiration, spirit, and "Spirit." Thus, in the second paragraph of the longer edition the wind imagery already suggests notions of the biblical Deity .

So from the beginning, the wind symbol becomes part of Mitchell's mode of dialectic realism, establishing the child-type perceptions, even within the omniscient narrative voice, to be juxtaposed against the rational, educated adult perceptions (the Digby-type perceptions). The same dialectic is built elsewhere in the novel, from the dialogue in Milt Palmer's shop, to the casual exchange between Digby and Brian

when the latter announces that he is going to visit God. Digby says, "`I'd like to go with you, but I have a previous engagement.'" When Brian asks, "`Who shall we say couldn't come?'" Digby answers, "`Just a schoolmaster'" (8). His gently ironic scepticism about an audience with the Creator reinforces that dialectic between idyll and mimetic realism developed within the narrative voice.

On the other hand, there are instructive examples where Weeks's simplistic philosophy of editing omniscient narrative voice works out for the benefit, arguably, of tight narration. For example, the direct characterization of Digby that follows is cut from the shorter version:

> He was a man of singular crooked will, prompting him to think a great deal about things that could not make him money or bring him the teapot fame relished by so many people in the town. . . . he had never completely lost that impulsive child personality that is unaware of itself and of anybody outside itself. This psychological contradiction of selflessness and selfishness might have explained his success as a teacher. (34)

This is arguably a case of "telling" when the same information could possibly be more effectively "shown" through action, dialogue, or narrative voice filtered through Digby's consciousness. The voice here could be construed as authorial intrusion in that it forces value judgements on us, not as any recognizable voice from the social milieu, but as an omniscient judge of character, values, psychological normalcy, and causation. If Mitchell's unfiltered narrative did this extensively it could weaken the narrative voices and the

characterization. The novel is probably not hurt by this last editorial cut, but overall the longer version is far superior in establishing the dialectic between the idyllic and mimetic realism, between the overt comic mode and the subtle tragic mode that deliberately undercuts and counterpoints the first. The characterization suffers considerably from the cuts, as is documented in Barbara Mitchell's essay, but perhaps the greatest damage is to the overall contrasting moods and especially to the counterpoint of tragic elements. This results in a significant softening of the impact of the dialectical realism and the thematic development.

MONOLOGIC VERSUS DIALOGIC OMNISCIENT VOICE

Unfortunately, the problems Weeks experienced in reading the narrative voice did not entirely disappear from critical reaction. Even as late as 1986, Sherrill Grace, in "Listen to the Voice: Dialogism and the Canadian Novel," criticizes the narrative voice that begins and concludes *Who Has Seen the Wind*, suggesting that the "homophonic" (125) narrator ruins a potentially dialogic novel making it, in fact, a "decidedly monologic novel" (125) and even "reactionary" (125). After allowing that some of the passages which she analyzes are dialogic and polyphonic, she concludes her ultimate denunciation as follows:

> Indeed, the narrator of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, whose voice we hear in the opening and closing pages, speaks with the conventional omniscience of the third person narrator coupled with the biblical

> authority of the Psalms. In speaking thus, he silences all the more disturbing, contradictory, and ambivalent impulses of the discourse; he stabilizes the potentially de-centred narrative, finalizes the character of his hero, and in the place of an authentic, ongoing dialogue about the important social, racial, moral, and philosophical issues raised by the voices in the text, he withdraws behind an impersonal voice that rejects fruitful ambiguity in favour of a kind of transcendental unitary perspective. What might have been an ideologically open argument becomes a deeply--and, for me, disturbingly--conservative attempt to depoliticize the text. (126-27)

In other words, Grace attempts to indict him for the worst crimes of closure and authorial intrusion. As to the latter, she does not recognize the opening and closing voices as possibly dialogic, but as monologic and didactic. The context of her remarks also reinforce the propriety of a detailed debate of her judgement. She starts her essay by asserting the following:

> The importance of Mikhail Bakhtin for literary scholarship does not reside in his often carelessly applied notions of carnival and polyphony. Bakhtin's primary significance lies in his dialogism . . . a vital method for analyzing not only texts, but concepts of literary canon, language acquisition, social identity, culture and ideology. (118)

Grace might well be right about the value of Bakhtin's critical tools, but her application of his methods slights the importance of analyzing the narrative voice, in favour of sweeping generalizations that would give Bakhtinian criticism an undeserved reputation for lack of rigour.

She briefly refers to a number of well known Canadian novelists and condemns the styles of Grove, MacLennan,

Callaghan, Davies, and Hood as being monologic (123). What she says about their writing styles helps one understand the context of her reaction to Mitchell:

> Each writes in what might loosely be called . . . the "Tory mode," and each creates fictional worlds (or narrative systems) characterized by a strong, authoritative, homophonic narrator who subjects all potential ambiguity, diversity of point of view, incipient heteroglossia, dialogue and character independence to the single-voiced discourse of the writers' "ultimate semantic authority." (123)

She describes accurately Bakhtin's concept of monologic narration, but while one can not help admiring the fearless sweep of her pen in deposing so many canonized writers in a single sentence, one can not help noticing the lack of concrete analysis of their actual fiction. That is not denying that *some* of their writings have already been, or might deserve to be, demoted by the "canonizers."

Again, she does analyze a passage from Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* and gives the passages high marks for being dialogic and polyphonic; however, overall she gives the novel a negative review, with the final pronouncement that "*Who Has Seen the Wind* is decidedly a monologic novel" (125). That, in Bakhtinian aesthetics, is a rather devastating indictment, and one that must be discussed in this study. However, to do justice to such a debate, a brief foray into Bakhtin's terms and concepts is necessary to illuminate Grace's possible oversights in applying Bakhtinian analysis.

BAKHTIN'S CONCEPT OF DIALOGISM

As Sherrill Grace asserts, dialogism is arguably Bakhtin's central concept. To dialogize fictional discourse, an author attempts to produce not only mimetic dialogue but also mimetic narrative voice (or voices). The narrative voice or voices are supposed to arise out of the milieu or setting of the novel to reflect the diversity and energy of the living language as opposed to a standardized, imposed, or institutionalized language. It is important to understand that Bakhtin uses "voice" metaphorically most of the time; that is, he does not mean a literally oral voice. However, the narrative voices should have, according to Bakhtin, certain linguistic qualities arising from the actual speech of real people from a real socio-linguistic milieu. One could expect then that dialogized prose should evoke a sense of place more readily than monologic prose. By this definition, even a monologue or a soliloquy or a meditation can be dialogic if the voices reflect oral language patterns to some degree. Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is an easy example of what Bakhtin is referring to in fiction. There is no mistaking any of Faulkner's narrative voices in that novel for monologic authorial voice. But what about Steinbeck's "authorial discourse" in some of the intercalary chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*? The important question for this study is whether Bakhtin would condemn such polemics, such rhetoric, as monologic, since the unfiltered narrative voices of

Steinbeck's intercalary chapters are roughly analogous in structure and purpose to Mitchell's omniscient passages that begin or conclude some chapters.

Bakhtin describes monologic prose this way: "Whatever these authorial ideas, whatever function they fulfil, they are *not represented. . . . They are expressed directly without distance*" (*Problems* 84). On the other hand, Bakhtin says that one of the tasks of stylistic analysis of fiction is, "if there *is* direct authorial discourse, determining the heteroglot background outside the work that dialogizes it" (*Dialogic* 416). Thus, Grace and other Bakhtinian critics should not automatically equate unfiltered omniscient narration ("authorial discourse") with monologic discourse. Bakhtin describes the dialogic quality of some omniscient narration as,

> *formally* belonging to authorial speech but clearly distanced from the mouth of the author by ironic, parodic, polemical, or some other pre-existing "qualified" intonation. (*Dialogic* 416)

The central argument against Grace is that the unfiltered omniscient narration introducing and concluding *Who Has Seen the Wind* (also, introducing and concluding several other chapters) acts like the polemical narration in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and is indeed dialogized through this "polemical" distancing from the implied author. Certainly Bakhtin's notion of "polemical distancing" needs clarification.

This concept of distancing is crucial to the critical tools of this study and to the broader definition of what is

or is not dialogic. It is crucial not just because dialogism is aesthetically valorized by Bakhtinian criticism, but also because dialogic voices seem to develop a sense of place better than monologic voices. So since distancing is a key to dialogizing a voice, readers will have to bear with some detail in examining the possible types of distancing, since the phrase "or some other . . . intonation" suggests that Bakhtin does not view those mentioned as exhaustive categories for distancing.

I would argue that narrative voice can be distanced from the author (thus establishing an ironic mode) in two general ways: first through distancing of language style, and second, through the less linguistic distancing of cognition or emotion. Bakhtin's last three distancing categories, "parodic, polemical, or some other pre-existing `qualified' intonation" (416), all depend largely on linguistic distancing, Bakhtin's main area of concern, although parody and polemics also depend on consciously crafted cognitive and emotional distance that goes beyond diction. So, the two types of distancing are often interrelated. One could argue, for example, that language style is key to all distancing, but though it is often used in creating cognitive or emotional distance, certainly the ironic distancing of maturity or ideology, part of cognitive distance, could be revealed through ideas not transparently reflected in the linguistics of the discourse. For example, the narrative voice in *The*

Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, when reflecting Duddy's thoughts or actions, is distanced from the implied author mainly by ideology and lack of maturity rather than by linguistics or diction. Thus ironic mode distancing is not entirely or simplistically linguistic distancing.

In most ironic mode fiction, ironic distance is created by the narrative filter or the first person narrator displaying less cognitive or emotional scope than the implied author (and less than the implied reader). This is accomplished through a combination of language style and point of view (which is more structural). Emotional distance could be reflected in anything from parody to the degree of empathy between the narrator and the implied author (or between narrator and reader). Thus, Bakhtin's category of polemical or rhetorical distance is produced primarily by linguistic styling, but also by cognitive distancing. Polemical dialogism can reflect either an emotional disparity (Hiebert's *Sarah Binks*) or an emotional empathy (*The Grapes of Wrath*) between the narrative voice and author. Empathy (lack of emotional distance) between author and narrative filter, for example, does not necessarily negate the linguistic or polemical distance of the narrative voice from a hypothetical authorial voice. Bakhtin goes further to insist that "authorial discourse" (unfiltered narrative agency) can be dialogic and that we can sometimes discover a "heteroglot background outside of the work that dialogizes" (*Dialogic* 416)

the unfiltered narration. Thus the point is that dialogic unfiltered narration, distanced from the author by polemics or other language stylistics, might well be *either* emotionally distanced *or* empathetically close to the implied author.

This last point is important in discriminating the dialogic quality of narrative voices in novels like *The Grapes of Wrath* or *Who Has Seen the Wind*, where the emotional and cognitive distances between the omniscient narrative agent and the implied author seem to be insignificant. The author, to some readers, seems to be speaking directly to the audience. But Bakhtin points out that a critic's ear must be aware of polemical voicing--an aspect of both linguistic and emotional distancing. For example, in Steinbeck's intercalary chapters some readers remember only the voice of an omniscient Steinbeck moralizing, but that is a failure to hear the differing polemical and linguistic distances, a failure to hear the orchestration of voices, the internal aesthetic rhetoric of the text as opposed to the externally bound ideological rhetoric.

Note the polemics of the narrative voice as it creates the artifice of a populist prophet's voice in the following:

> Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart. . . . This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning--from "I" to "we". (Steinbeck 165)

That is not the same polemical or rhetorical strategy as follows, where the Okies' vernacular thoughts are counterpointed by the omniscient voice:

> Our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor. Pray God some day a kid can eat.
>
> And the association of owners knew that some day the praying would stop.
>
> And there's the end. (255)

In these intercalary chapters, Steinbeck mixes the narrative agent voices (populist prophet, geographer, social historian, or even objective camera eye) with filtered voices, typical citizen's voices. He does this often without the parameters of quotes or paragraph breaks, orchestrating the heteroglossia into an effective aesthetic rhetoric; however, what those chapters are remembered for is their ideological rhetoric. Yet in Bakhtin's terms, all of those voices are distanced from the implied author in different ways and all are dialogized.

THE POLEMICS OF *WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND*'S NARRATIVE VOICE

These analytic points are laboured at some length in order to address the case of the well known W.O. Mitchell passages featuring the wind and other natural prairie phenomena at the beginning and end of *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Although Grace condemns them, Bakhtin is clearly calling on the critics to analyze the dialogic nature of not only dialogue, first person narration, and third person filtered narration, but also of unfiltered third person discourse--what Chatman calls "the narrative agent" (*Coming* 119) and what Bakhtin calls "authorial discourse" (*Dialogic* 416).

The narrative portions in question might not seem to have cognitive or emotional distance from the implied author, but

they are polemical, and distanced through consciously crafted rhetoric like Steinbeck's unfiltered narrative agents. Also, Mitchell's narrative agent passages are just as well orchestrated with the other dialectic and dialogic voices of the novel as are Steinbeck's. Mitchell's polemics (aesthetic and ideological rhetoric) in these passages, like Steinbeck's, include the rhetorical rhythms of language and syntax, the rhythms of motifs and image clusters, and the polemical advancement and debate of the themes.

Grace seems to suggest that the author is violating objectivity by telegraphing his own ideology as a kind of closure because he is using unfiltered omniscient voice. She does not seem to be familiar with Booth's arguments in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that "the tendency to connect the author's objectivity with a required impersonality of technique is quite indefensible" (83). Booth points out the complex distinctions and relationships between the author, the implied author, the narrator, and the audience. He argues diligently for broader reading strategies instead of simplistic and prescriptive strictures such as those wielded by narrow Jamesian extremists against perceived "authorial intrusion." Grace almost reduces Bakhtin's insights to the level of Percy Lubbock's crusade for a "correctly" distanced narrator, which virtually means that a third person narrator must be either a narrative voice properly filtered through a character, or else an objective camera-eye narrative voice.

If Mitchell's narrative agent at the beginning and end of the novel were to manipulate character development and conflict towards a rapid and unforseen conclusion, or if it bullied the reader toward some exclusive metaphysical or theological solution to "the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life" (*Who,* Preface), then Grace might have a case for her disappointment and invective. But, if the created voice truly could emanate from the landscape within the book or from the actual southern Saskatchewan Great Depression landscape, if the voice is not all that remote from the consciousness, perceptions, and imagination of a man like Digby, whose voice seems believable enough, and if the narrative agent purposefully reflects such a voice, then it is a legitimately dialogized voice arising from the cultural and sociolinguistic milieu of the Canadian Prairies of that era. If the voice rhetorically orchestrates the conflicts and the thematic oppositions already well established by the other dialogic and polyphonic voices of the novel, then the accusations of heavy-handed, monologic closure are misguided and an example of over simplified, pseudo-Bakhtinian criticism. All of the following arguments in this section and later sections that address the Sherrill Grace passage are aimed either at refuting the first two conditional clauses of this paragraph or alternatively at establishing the remainder of the conditional clauses.

An examination of the narrative voices' aesthetic rhetoric in the final pages should begin to answer some of

these questions. A reasonable starting point might be near the narrative shift from the voice filtered through Brian's consciousness and perceptions to the unfiltered omniscient narrative agent that concludes the novel. The shift begins after Brian has admitted that he will probably never experience that mystical "feeling" again, which Digby relates to the theme of "Intimations of Immortality"--in other words Digby suggests that Brian has outgrown the age of innocence and of idyllic transcendence. Brian reviews the progression of deaths that have created the opposite pole of the dialectic to his earlier "feelings" of transcendence, and he admits to himself that he is stymied in his search for some overall explanation or comprehension, but he swears that "Some day . . . he would know. He would find out completely and for good. He would be satisfied" (343). Surely this is ironic and dialogized, because neither Digby nor Milt Palmer has attained that knowledge or satisfaction, and they are significantly empathetic and open characters. Irony like this does not seem to lead toward romantic, or authorial, or didactic closure.

In concluding this voice that is dialogized through Brian's consciousness and perceptions, Mitchell introduces a rather significant image:

> Some day. The thing could not hide from him forever.
>
> A startled jack rabbit leaped suddenly into the air ahead of him. Ears ridiculously erect, in seeking spurts now to one side, now to the other, it went bounding idiotically out over the prairie.

(343)

The naive confidence or hope of the boy is juxtaposed against the random directions of the small, scared prairie creature. The seeking "ears ridiculously erect" are seen through Brian's eyes, but ironically identified by the reader as parallel to Brian's "seeking" mind. "Idiotically" enforces the ironic distance between Brian's innocent comprehension and the implied author's comprehension. The voice is dialogized by that distance, and as Harrison suggests, such an image indicates that "his prospects are . . . not encouraging . . . Brian will go on seeking" (W.O. 168). Such ironic distance between the narrative voice and the author is not monologic, nor does the irony of the image allow much room for a "transcendental unitary perspective" (Grace 126), especially considering that these are the last recorded perceptions and thoughts of the protagonist.

Of course, Grace's main complaint seems to be directed toward the unfiltered narrative voice that immediately follows that passage, though she seems to exaggerate the length and the separateness of the omniscient portion. Yet that portion contains the final orchestration of idyllic impulses juxtaposed against the reality of death in an awesome but amoral cosmos. Death and birth, dark and light images are counterpointed as continuing motifs here, along with the breathing wind, the grass, the soil, the dust, and the bone imagery. This dialogue between language describing a sentient

landscape (previously supported by narration filtered through Brian's idyllic immaturity) and language describing naturalistic nature (previously represented by the mature Digby-like consciousness) orchestrates and dialogizes the passage. The polemical and rhetorical strategies of syntactical rhythm, repetition, and other rhetorical devices of this passage, are even more dialectical (and thus emotionally and linguistically distanced from the implied author) than the polemical passages in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mitchell's polemical dialogue in the narrative voice is an example of the distancing that Bakhtin asks us to analyze when he includes "polemical" (*Dialogic* 416) as a type of distancing that dialogizes omniscient narration.

As to Grace's accusation of heavy handed closure, the novel's ideological rhetoric is left carefully open, and balanced, with the "ultimate meaning of the cycle of life" and death respectfully unanswered. Rather than silencing the "ambivalent impulses of the discourse" (Grace 126), the overall effect of the narrative shift from the filter of Brian's perceptions to the eye of the omniscient agent is haunting and dramatic in a cinematic sense. The camera eye, or rather the new centre of sensory reception, is no longer necessarily on Brian's ground level where the rabbit bolted, but neither is it emanating from a heavenly throne dispensing judgement on the issues of light and dark, faith and doubt.

This is a narrative voice different from the child-type

perceptions reflected in the novel's second paragraph with the "blown cheeks" of the cloud (1), but more akin to the voice in the novel's first sentence that is trying valiantly to take the measure of a natural world that offers no mathematical simplicity. Certainly, the tone of the voice contrasts with the filtered voice reflecting Brian's final perceptions, which precedes the narrative shift, but the dialectic and the dialogue of ideas in the narrative agent's passage are a continuation of the polemical debate which characterizes and dialogizes the narrative passages preceding it. The final voice begins with the winter notes, to pick up on the winter death of the grandmother: "The day greys, its light withdrawing from the winter sky" (343). The wind in the first two paragraphs of this final passage is a winter wind, and the drifts are snow--not dust.

The voice carefully alludes to past images, like the dog and the coyote, the train sounds and the wind sounds, the town lights and the Northern Lights, juxtaposing the controlled human environment to uncontrolled wilderness. Then as time accelerates, it alludes also to the grass and the graves, the dog skeleton and the tumbleweed skeleton, the rich soil and the dust, the bones and the ant, and of course the wind and the prairie. Yes, we do sense the baton of the conductor, the careful score of the composer drawing the orchestration to a final chord, but we do not sense a rejection of "fruitful ambiguity, in favour of a kind of transcendental unitary

perspective" (Grace 126); we sense a burgeoning of evocative ambiguity and a dialectic between man's need to order, to understand, and nature's huge amoral cosmos in which our very curiosity seems curious from that more distanced perspective offered by the final narrative voice. This dialectic voice continues and completes Mitchell's dialogic and polyphonic exploration of the prairie landscape and social milieu.

The movement of time in this passage is as important to the orchestration of the voice as is the movement of the camera-eye that pans backwards for the larger panoramic shot. Mitchell starts by describing those paired metonymical images (dog and coyote, train whistle and wind's song, town lights in contrast with northern lights), all possible occurrences in the landscape that very evening as Brian completes his walk home. But then at the end of the Northern Lights imagery and at the beginning of the town lights imagery he uses the plural "prairie nights" and "light glows each evening" (334), which means that the narrative perspective is not only panning to enlarge the spatial dimensions, but also to enlarge the time dimension. In the following paragraph the perspective accelerates from day to night, from day to day, from season to season, year to year, and finally both backward and forward in time with grave and soil images juxtaposed to the renewal of poplar and grass. Then the score moves from the general to the specific focus, from time accelerated to time specific, not in the final recorded winter season of Brian's journey

but in an archetypal scene of prairie realism, as we zoom in on the pilgrim ant, and out again with the wind whose pilgrimage to that "far line of the sky" has no final shrine as a destination. Even time, at least time as we comprehend it, is obliterated in that "whirling . . . smoking funnel, breathing up topsoil and tumbleweed skeletons" (344).

The juxtaposed images in the final paragraphs echo established motifs from previous narrative passages. For example, the coyote/dog images invoke the mythology of prairie wilderness as partially reflected in the narratives the grandmother tells to Brian about the interaction of the settlers with the animals of the wilderness: bobcat, bear, and coyote. These reflect the idyllic notions of the settler society: the urge to tame the coyote (metonymically representing the wilderness), the idyllic impulse to anthropomorphize the bobcat, the mythic warning of the bear (representing the wilderness) that it does not feel like playing (319-21). So in this final passage, after the domesticated dog barks and is answered, "a coyote lifts his howl, his throat line long to the dog nose pointing out the moon" (344). This image suggests the same dialectic between idyllic notions of man's relationship with wilderness and the real wilderness, represented variously by the caged owl, the young Ben, the tornado, the dust storms, and even by Saint Sammy as a victim of the wilderness.

The Northern Lights are also part of a mythology of the

Northern and Prairie wildernesses that is often mined by the likes of Robert Service or Farley Mowat. The idyllic legends about these lights reflect both native and white pastoral and primitivist notions. The image of ghost dancers lighting the path of the grandfathers to more plentiful hunting beyond the grave invokes the idyllic urge for perfect community as surely as does the apocalyptic New Jerusalem. The legends that some can whistle down the Northern Lights reflects an idyllic urge for communion with the ancestors and their special knowledge. These myths are invoked against the illusiveness of the lights "dying here, imperceptibly reborn over there" (344). This light parallels that illusive feeling of transcendence pursued by Brian, and probably also suggests the regenerative power of the prairie to sustain the birth and death cycle.

These ghost dancers are contrasted with the more temporal lights of a town which Mitchell represents here as a small natural community. That "hiving sound" (344) compares the town to an impermanent but naturally industrious beehive. The community, which has been an important part of the comic vision of the novel, is juxtaposed against the "distinct and separate" shout and the "woman's laugh" (344). Much could be said about these intersecting axes of individual and society, how Mitchell fits the individual pilgrimage from innocence to experience into the comic social conflict centred in the town. Here, it is enough to say that these images of human emotion and struggle are neither negative nor transcendent; the shout

and the laugh are described as "clear--truant sound" (344). They have a certain fleeting existential essence, like the ant's pilgrimage up the skeleton of the dead dog.

In other words, the narrative voice has distanced our perspective to such a panoramic overview that the cry of humanity is respectfully small in the cosmos, where the understanding of man's place in the life cycle and the ultimate meaning of the life cycle are as much a mystery as the diligence of the ant or the bee. Yet the shout and the laugh are metonymical of the human struggle to cope with man's place on earth. It is one of the first times in our Prairie fiction that such human emotions are presented without sentimentality as ecologically indigenous to the prairie. Thus, the tragicomic dialectic is left open ended without overbearing ideological closure; this is an honest sense of place, not an idyllic one.

The human laugh in the midst of the all-pervasive wilderness relates ironically to the wind-sucked dust "whirling into a smoking funnel," and to the prairie beneath the grass and the gravestones, described ambiguously as, "This soil is rich" (344). The deliberate irony here is more than a monologic assertion of the historical richness of man's contribution to the life-cycle. It includes the ironic connotations of the literal richness of soil, made rich by the decaying bodies, as if the one rather permanent contribution man makes to the prairie ecosystem is a few acres of loam that

can not easily be eroded or turned into "blow dirt." Yet the metaphorical connotations of historical richness are undeniably there as well, playing against that previous symbol of the connected telephone poles marching toward the horizons, both forward in time and backward in history (343) like the genealogical projections of man.

This balance is typical of the "rich" ambiguity of the final passages. Certainly, the erosion-denuded skeleton of the dog, with the wind "in silent frenzy" exposing its emptiness (except for that ant) does not allow the honest reader to shout for joy at a "transcendental unitary perspective" (Grace 126). But neither does that carefully orchestrated final voice force the reader to stare hopelessly into the void without some degree of respect for man's occasionally diligent search for meaning and for his place on the prairie. The void is not avoided, but neither is it embraced; there is closure in neither direction. We are merely prompted to continue the search on different levels with these archetypes of immaturity and maturity (Brian and Digby), to continue in the feeble light of the pilgrim ant and other questers who predate us, as well as those to come.

Thus, one can appreciate this passage's wealth of metaphor, metonymy, orchestration of motifs, language rhythms, and elements of prosody so eloquently described by Gingell-Beckman (222-30) and others. Yet, due to the voice's profound ability to evoke philosophical meditation as well as material

sense of place, some critics like Grace seem to feel that it does not or could not emanate from the prairie in the same way as the dialogue of working class, uneducated characters (like Sean or Saint Sammy). But this is a misunderstanding of Bakhtin and dialogism, just as it is a misunderstanding and an oversimplification of the prairie and its social complexity. Educated, philosophical voices like Digby's (his consciousness is the model for much of the unfiltered narrative voice) are just as much a part of the heteroglossia and a part of the prairie sociolinguistic milieu as Ivan's philosophical meditations in *The Brothers Karamazov* are part of nineteenth-century Russia's heteroglossia (and Dostoevsky's fictional voices are Bakhtin's original paradigm of dialogism).

Mitchell's polemical dialectic between ideologies is much like the ones going on between Alyosha (naive and idyllic) and Ivan (worldly wise and rational) in the Dostoevsky novel. The dialectic and the internal dialogism is obvious in the narrative voice recording Brian's final meditation, which alludes to other voices throughout the novel. As I have demonstrated, these allusions continue through the final narrative agent's voice, which also continues the dialectic and the dialogue of ideas recalling the grandmother's voice and especially the two dominant voices of innocence and experience. One cannot, without great insensitivity to the aesthetic rhetoric, separate this final unfiltered narrative voice, which soars up in the howling symphony of wind and

Northern Lights, from the greater dialogue of voices and ideologies to which the final voice alludes. The final passage, from the point where Brian leaves Digby to the novel's end, continues the dominant dialectic of ideas and dialogue of voices that have throughout the novel evoked that sense of place for which this fiction is justly famous. To declare this one small part of the orchestration monologic does violence to Bakhtin's broad notion of dialogism.

Barbara Mitchell quotes the letter from *Atlantic* editor, Edward Weeks, dated Dec. 6, 1945:

> The last two pages are now the weakest in the book, and they should be the best. The story in our minds will end with Brian, not with the wind. What of his future. (B. Mitchell 11)

What is it then that Weeks and Grace, some forty years apart, are objecting to, when most critics and reviewers now see this passage as a *tour de force* and as exemplary of that prairie sense of place? The objections seem to have something in common at a very basic level. Both perceive the passage to be "telling" rather than "showing," probably because it is unfiltered third person narrative voice. Thus Weeks is calling for something more dramatic and upbeat to conclude his misreading of the *Bildungsroman* development, but certainly not a descriptive landscape passage that he considers to be static "telling" rather than "showing."

Grace's objections are more complex, but she too believes that there is something aesthetically wrong with an unfiltered omniscient narrative voice closing the novel with carefully

chosen imagery and landscape description. Her call for a more dialogic voice is really a call for a narrative voice that reflects the language of one of the characters and avoids what she mistakenly thinks is "transcendent" imagery and tone. That is fairly clear from her analysis of a passage where the narrative voice is filtered through Brian's consciousness (Grace 124-25). Thus she too is really calling for narrative voices that are more clearly mimetic--"showing" rather than "telling." One might excuse Weeks as a modernist editor still influenced by turn-of-the-century theories of narrative aesthetics, but for contemporary critics such over-simplification of narrative theory should have been laid to rest by Booth's influential arguments in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and by a closer reading of Bakhtin's final chapter in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

So in summary, the shift in narrative voices, the polemical dialectic and dialogue of ideas, and the aesthetic rhetoric which continually alludes to former voices in the dialogue and in the dialectic all help to dialogize the final pages of narration, thereby evoking a rarely equalled sense of place. Clearly, rigourous analysis calls for a more complex understanding of dialogism than the simplistic idea that dialogic narrative voice equals distancing through filtered narration, although this form is a more commonly recognized method of dialogizing narrative voice. Mitchell's polemical narrative voices also develop metaphorical and metonymical

imagery as well as motifs that reinforce part of an open-ended existential argument in the *ideological* rhetoric of the novel, even as the narrative voices bring about a finely crafted completion to the *aesthetic* rhetoric.

WILDERNESS IDYLL VERSUS GARDEN MYTHOLOGY

Sherrill Grace is not the only critic to condemn or praise Mitchell for a "transcendental unitary perspective" (Grace 126) in this novel. Harrison, in "W.O. Mitchell and His Works" and again in *Intimations of Mortality (1993)*, highlights the debate between those who believe that Mitchell presents a transcendental perspective and those who interpret his presentation as more naturalistic. He argues convincingly that Mitchell never betrays the natural order and that there is no authorial impulse toward transcendence to mute the final death imagery. He also rightly objects to any notion that this is "naive romantic comedy celebrating the redemption of the fictional world from its fallen state" (W.O. 163). Indeed, Mitchell, in this novel, seems very much aware of the naivety and romance of edenic garden mythology in regional prairie fiction. Harrison documents this naivety in early idyllic prairie fiction in "Eden, Surveyed and Fenced" (*Unnamed* 72-99). Part of Mitchell's narrative strategy is to juxtapose the Garden Myth with a kind of prairie primitivism or prairie wilderness idyll, and then to juxtapose both idylls to a naturalistic vision of the prairie wilderness.

Earlier, I suggested that regional idyllic notion of wilderness influenced many modes of Northern and Western Canadian fiction and poetry. This should not be confused with the American Western Frontier Myth with its well defined mythos. Both forms of wilderness idylls no doubt have elements of primitivism in common, but the Canadian wilderness idylls are much more fragmented, regional, and localized, thus giving each region some distinctive idyllic character types. The various romanticized types emerging from this primitivism from the different regions include mountain men, courier de bois, lumber jacks, romanticized natives, prairie naturals, earthy sod-busters, rural earth-mothers, as well as romanticized trappers, miners, and "mushers." French Canadian fiction turns to some of these types frequently. In prairie primitivism, as in any northern primitivism, a sentient wilderness judges between worthy and unworthy. We find Farley Mowat evoking such primitivism in some of his stories in *The Snow Walker*, like "The Iron Men," and Howard O'Hagan evokes this wilderness primitivism in many of his short stories about wilderness men. *Tay John* is a good example of ironic handling of wilderness myth, where O'Hagan juxtaposes primitivism and realism. I have already mentioned romancers like Jack London and Robert Service who have tapped into this wilderness idyll, but *Who Has Seen the Wind*, like *Tay John*, employs a more serious ironic use of the wilderness myth.

Certainly, Northern primitivism and wilderness idylls

exist in sharp contrast to the garden mythology which is a prime generator of pastoral impulses from the Judaeo-Christian heritage. One might rhetorically suggest that *Who Has Seen the Wind* juxtaposes two very different omnipotent deities: the Deity of the Garden mythology and the "deity" of the prairie wilderness idyll (despite Mitchell's didactic preface).

The point is not that Mitchell is theologically challenging the supreme deity of Semitic monotheism with a new Contender, but that he is deliberately invoking new regional idyllic impulses and contrasting them to the old Garden Mythology. The new "deity" is more the god of the wilderness than the god of the farmland; after all, the God of the Reverend Hislop, "herder of God's Presbyterian sheep" (28) is "all grapes and bloody . . . [and] carries around a lamb" (6), and when a little boy dies, He changes him into "a boy angel" (28) with feathery white wings. Mitchell presents this as a popular pastoral notion spawned by Old World, Garden of Innocence mythology that will not stand up to even a prairie boy's scrutiny.

Mitchell contrasts the Garden idyll to his New World wilderness deity: "a pervasive emptiness, as though the prairie itself was breathing in long gusting breaths, unhampered by the buildings of the town, warm and living against his face and in his hair" (13). This is a sentient wind, unimpressed with the civilized efforts of man, but ready to judge between the "worthy" and the "unworthy." It is

idealized and therefore idyllic. Then in contrast to "warm and living," the narrator later describes "the wind, singing fierce . . . shearing high and higher still, singing vibrance in a void, forever and forever wild" (308). This is the wind that dusted out the farmers, good and bad alike. Yes, it flattened Bent Candy's barn, but it also drove Sammy Belterlaben (138) from his livelihood and turned him into a madman, victim rather than prophet of the wilderness deity.

It might well be conceptually simpler to analyze Mitchell's mode as a juxtaposition of the Old World garden idyll with naturalistic prairie realism, but the complexity of the discourse's dialectic suggests that this would be an oversimplification. In the comic mode, focused on the adult conflicts rather than on Brian's development, Mitchell creates a conflict between the two mythologies: the garden mythology and prairie primitivism. All the important characters, aside from Brian, are metaphorically either children of the garden "deity" or the prairie "deity." In the comic mode, the wind ironically acts as a coincidental agent of justice (typical primitivism), but in the Bildungsroman mode focusing on Brian's development, an honest and unsentimental prairie realism is juxtaposed against all the idyllic impulses. In this mode, the reader is asked to doubt any possibility of a sentient wind or a wind that dispenses divine justice either by direction or by its own volition. That does not lessen the effectiveness of the comic contrast between the wilderness

idyll and the garden myth.

The New World wilderness idyll, or prairie primitivism in this particular case, is as different from the Edenic pastoral vision as the uncultivated prairie is removed from the domesticated fields and vineyards of Europe. This wilderness primitivism also invokes an idealized prairie, but it is a home-grown idyll more suited to some of the region's literature than the garden mythology. It is an idealized prairie wilderness because it alienates only those whose civilized, urban trappings have cut them off from recognizing their tiny niche in the wilderness life cycle. The idealized or primitivist wilderness deliberately tests a man's mettle, teaches him humility, snuffs out those who learn too slowly, antagonizes established society, and sometimes for the person who is worthy, the wilderness allows them a new identity--children of the wilderness.

Mitchell employs the wilderness "deity" as a foil for the domesticated Presbyterian Deity, but he also juxtaposes this myth with a more realistic version of the prairie. For example, the often quoted passage about the dew drop on the spirea leaf manages to engage both juxtapositions: the wilderness idyll versus the garden myth, and the wilderness idyll versus mimetic prairie realism. The passage is frequently used to point out not only Mitchell's lyricism, but also his idyllic impulses. Because of passages like this one, some have even misguidedly called the novel a prairie idyll

(MacLulich 138). But to put the passage in context, it is part of the sabbath when Brian first tries to relate his feelings of transcendence in the presence of the wind (and of nature's mysteries) to his societal dogmas about the Deity associated with the Presbyterian church. The chapter and the episode end with his exit from the church after an ambivalent if not downright disappointing experience searching for signs of God in the church. He stops by the bushes along the wide stone wall of the church yard. He observes that "*their* leaves were quite dry" (133). This whole conclusion is cut from the common shorter version. The pastoralism of the succoured lamb imagery in Powelly's sermon is also ironically undercut by the analogy to The Ben who, as a bona fide natural child of the prairie wilderness, does not fit well into the Edenic Fall and Redemption mythology.

In this context, the irony undercuts Brian's feeling of "breathlessness and expectancy" (126), so that the passage also reads as a typical example of Mitchell juxtaposing the wilderness primitivism against mimetic realism. The language is deliberately allusive and adult in describing the child's sensations:

> cradled in the curve of the leaves . . . a star's cold light in its pure heart. . . . The barest breath of wind stirred at his face . . . it was happening an alchemy imperceptible as the morning wind, a growing elation of such fleeting delicacy and poignancy. . . . He was filled with breathlessness and expectancy, as though he was going to be given something, as though he was about to find something.
>
> "Breakfast, Spalpeen."

The feeling broke. (125-26)

We will return to this stylistic point about the narrative voice employing language and allusive conceptions beyond the cognizance of the six year old narrative filter, but the thematic implications anticipate a dialectic between the idyllic impulses and the adult realism. The wind here is "caressing" as opposed to its counter intensity described often as "gusting." The phrase, "As though he was going to be given something" (edited to the subjunctive, "as though he were," in the shorter editions), suggests connotations of impending supernatural revelation. He ironically receives only a summons to breakfast from a lesser authority. Neither does he receive the anticipated revelation in church that day, as he searches for the "Being" that is supposedly inspiring Rev. Powelly, although he imagines "that he could almost distinguish a deeper darkness, a phantom shadow high under the vaulting roof" (132). So the passage is juxtaposed against the shallowness of Powelly, against the comedy of the Ben's enlightenment, against the disappearance of the "feeling" or any other transcendent revelation in the church, and in conclusion, against the "dry" leaves along the church yard wall.

DIALOGIC VOICE IN THE SPIREA LEAF PASSAGE

Again, Grace might claim that the narrative voice in this passage is monologic because the language style is much like

the diction of the narrative agent beginning and ending the novel, because certainly the diction and the allusive concepts are beyond the comprehension of a six year old boy. However, such a judgement would reveal a another misunderstanding of dialogism and of narrative voice dynamics in general. The traditional term of "limited omniscience" is quite inadequate in this debate, because although the focalization (who perceives) is filtered through Brian, there are at least two other issues: whose consciousness or concepts are being articulated, and what kind of language or "speech" is articulating the cognition and the perception.

Genette attempts to analyze point of view into concepts of focalizer and voice, who sees and who speaks (211-12). However, in actual fiction, this "voice" (which for Genette refers only to the narrative diction) sometimes reflects concepts beyond the focalizer's cognitive ability, while in other cases the "voice" restricts the concepts of the diction to those within the consciousness of the focalizer. Thus who sees (sensory centre), who conceptualizes (cognitive centre), and who "speaks" (diction) are all important issues in analyzing dialogism and are not necessarily neatly divided.

Genette's combination of the first two (sensory centre and cognitive centre) under one term--focalizer, along with his limiting of the term, voice, to refer only to diction, does not work well with this passage. The line "it was happening, an alchemy imperceptible as the morning wind"

reflects a diction and a cognitive level quite beyond Brian, the sensory focalizer. Thus the cognitive centre (ideas) and the "voice" (diction) seem united in their separation from the sensory centre (Brian), instead of obeying Genette's conception of the focalizer including both the sensory centre and the cognitive centre.

On the other hand, the passages, "its caress was part of the strange enchantment too" (125), and "a growing elation of such fleeting delicacy and poignancy that he dared not turn his mind to it for fear that he might spoil it" (125), both reflect the sensations *and* the ideas of Brian, thus fitting Genette's definition of a focalizer separated from the actual adult diction (Genette's "voice"). "Delicacy" and "poignancy" are impressions that Brian might well experience without having the vocabulary, but "alchemy imperceptible" reflects concepts that only the reader (not the child) can appreciate. Because of such problems with that middle category, the cognitive centre, which is sometimes part of who sees and sometimes part of who speaks, this study refuses to use the term *"voice"* so narrowly, in reference only to the diction level. In this passage one notes a similar diction level being used to reflect both the child's cognitive process and the narrative agent's analysis of the cognitive process.

Thus, having already established that the term *voice* is a metaphor, this study uses the term in a broader context than does Genette. The narrative voice, in this case, (as

throughout the study) refers to the entire strategy, structuring, and language style of this particular narrative passage, including who sees, who thinks, and who speaks. Chatman occasionally uses "narrative voice" in this broader way (189) instead of his preferred term, "narrative presentation," and he also rejects Genette's narrower and ambiguous use of the term "voice" (113).

Thus the narrative voice of this passage is dialogized entirely, not because the diction is Brian's language, nor the language of another actual character, but because the polemics and rhetoric of the passage are so purposefully idyllic, with philosophic and ironic distance from the author. The idyllic tone is undercut by its juxtaposition to the mimetic realism of subsequent passages, like the call for breakfast, the disappointing church experience, and the symbolic dry leaves at the end of the episode.

Although a single consistent narrative voice can be dialogic even if not polyphonic, the voice here is not a single homogenous voice. The end of the spirea leaf and dew drop passage reads, "as though he was [sic] going to be given something, as though he was [sic] about to find something" (126). After all that lofty diction more characteristic of unfiltered narrative passages, this diction seems to reflect the imprecise language of six year old Brian. It is not just the poor grammar of missing the subjunctive mood, but also the simplicity and vagueness of "given something" and "find

something." Thus the voice has slipped down at least three minor narrative shifts from "alchemy imperceptible" (both diction and cognitive centre distanced from Brian), to "such fleeting delicacy and poignancy that he dared not turn his mind to it for fear that he might spoil it" (sensory and cognitive filter distanced from the higher diction level), and finally to "as though he was about to find something," where the diction, the cognitive centre, and the sensory perception are all filtered perfectly through Brian.

Yet not many serious critics would ever point to this passage as containing disturbing narrative shifts in point of view that detract from the aesthetic rhetoric. The overall narrative voice in this chapter is quite effective; it develops the idyllic notions of the mystical power of the prairie, giving definition to the transcendental "feeling" that becomes such a central motif and an important part of the idyllic impulses juxtaposed against the mimetic realism that undercuts the idyllic.

A BAKHTINIAN SYMPHONY OF DIALOGIC VOICES

Bakhtin is quite a radical theorist on narrative discourse because he insists that the novel (not excluding short fiction) is a unique form of predominantly "verbal" art, while narratologists like Chatman consider it to be predominantly "diegetic" art in comparison with drama (115). Referring to discourse in the novel, Bakhtin introduces a

seminal essay by stating the following:

> the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract "formal" approach and an equally abstract "ideological" approach. Form and content in discourse are one once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. (*Dialogic* 259)

He recognizes more "verbal" voices in the narrative than any other critic mainly because he includes any articulation of verbal-like diction as being a "voice"--for example, internal voices or any meditative narrative passage that displays vaguely mimetic diction with some verbal roots. Thus the term *narrative voice* (which does not refer to literal voices) is congenial to Bakhtinian analysis as well as to any analyses of Mitchell's narratives.

Who Has Seen the Wind is saturated with voices whose language, colour, and conceptual field arise from the social and linguistic milieu of the Canadian Prairies of the Great Depression. Bakhtin gives us some general examples of what he means by voices arising from a sociolinguistic milieu:

> The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national langauge into social dialects . . . professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day . . . this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (*Dialogic* 262-63)

A memorable example, from *Who Has Seen the Wind,* of Mitchell documenting a jargon arising out of the particular socioeconomic conditions was unfortunately cut by Weeks from the shorter version. Here the narrative agent describes the displaced migrant workers and "bums" who rode the rails:

> according to their vices they divided themselves into: "McGoof Hounds", "junkers", "winos", "canned-heat artists", "rubby-dubs", "wolves", "proosians", "gazoonas", "gazeets", and "gazats". According to their way of getting food: "winter christians and mission stiffs", "ding-bats", "dinos", "lump and stew bums". Some carried "bindles"; all hated "the mounties, harness bulls, and town clowns"; they spoke patronizingly of farmers as "hooziers and johns". They left their pencilled marks on doors of generous people: "Champ 32", "CPR 10", "CNR Jos", "21-Circle." (197-98)

To Weeks, an Eastern American editor, references to the CPR and even stranger idioms must have been obscure. However, for those of us who had older relatives that spoke of the "Dirty Thirties" in Saskatchewan, whose vernacular diction was marked by the social upheaval of those years, and of course for all those who lived through it all, this passage adds depth to the dialectics of juxtaposed narrative voices. When one finds out what "wolf" (pedophile), "harness bull" (railroad employed enforcers), and the other various slang terms signify, it lends an ominous chord to counterpoint Brian's naive vulnerability as he wanders the town in search of knowledge.

Earlier in the novel, Mitchell begins several other chapters with similar unfiltered narrative voices evoking the setting with a distinctive Saskatchewan "Thirties" sense of place. Just as Steinbeck's intercalary chapters in *The Grapes*

of Wrath provide a broader geographical and sociological perspective, so these passages define the prairies of the Great Depression with broad swift strokes of language and landscape distinctive of the region. Chapter seven (chapter eight in the shorter edition) begins by describing the harvest season in a prairie town with words and scenes peculiar to that landscape: "yellow-stubbled fields . . . thinly stooked with the meagre stooks of lean times" (77). He uses the jargon of harvest as it was then, describing "threshing machines with feeders turned back upon themselves" or "wheeled half-cylinders of water wagons" and "long caterpillars of grain freights" (77). He succinctly evokes the socioeconomic realities of displaced labour in the following passage:

> Strange men swung down from the trains, their blanket rolls slung over one shoulder . . . their lean faces dark with coal dust. They stood before the beer parlour . . . waiting for the farmers who came looking for bundle pitchers, spikers, and team skinners. (77-8)

The passage goes on to describe the working conditions and the hopeless economics of farming and farm labour, but notice both the harvest jargon and the local perspective suggested by "strange." Here again is a dialogic though unfiltered narrative voice evoking the sense of place.

Though vernacular language is important in dialogizing narrative voice and developing sense of place, some of these passages develop the sense of place at a more complex level than the sensory by juxtaposing the idyllic impulses with imagery that is philosophically suggestive of a naturalistic

realism. Chapter eleven (twelve in the shorter edition) begins with a description of Spring's advent, and despite plenty of precedent for sentimentality in such a description, Mitchell employs detailed mimetic accuracy in chronicling the retreat of the snow from fallow fields, stubble fields, then barrow pits (120). Then note the following juxtaposition:

> Meadowlarks were suddenly upon the straw stacks, telephone wires, fence posts, their song clear with ineffable exuberance that startled and deepened the prairie silence--each quick and impudent climax of notes leaving behind it a vaster, emptier, prairie world. (120)

The sense of place comes not so much from the diction, like "telephone wires," as from the juxtaposition of the meadowlark's exuberance and the philosophic connotations of the silence of a "vaster, emptier, prairie" (120).

Other memorable dialogic voices surround the narrative of Saint Sammy, and these also grow out of the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of that time and place. First, Uncle Sean's short monologue characterizes Saint Sammy more effectively than an omniscient voice:

> "Years a gittin' rusted out an' cut-wormed out an' hoppered out an' hailed out an' droughted out an' rusted out an' smutted out, he up an' got good an goddam tired out. Crazier'n a cut calf." (139)

The vernacular diction reveals social attitudes toward economic and psychological realities. It reveals a mixture of empathy and hardness, and it gives a context for the reader to interpret the "oracles" of Sammy Belterlaben (138) as revealing a victim. This revelation contrasts with the

romantic characterization of Sammy as the comic hero of a confrontation between a Baptist hypocrite and a Prairie saint.

The monologues of Saint Sammy are dialogized ironically to reveal the complex mythos of the prairie immigrant. The clash of the King James diction with the earthy prairie vernacular reflects some of the linguistic warp and woof of the prairie culture, arising from the Old World mythology and New World ideals. In the passage that follows, Saint Sammy's account of Eden is not only dialogized by its mixed concepts and diction, but it is typically juxtaposed against the allusive and imagistic voice of the narrative agent:

> "To start with he gave a flip to the fly-wheel a thought, an' there was Heaven an' earth an' Him plumb in the middle... An' He got to thinkin', there ain't nobody fer to till this here soil, to one-way her, to drill her, ner to stook the crops, an' pitch the bundles, an' thrash her...so He took Him some top soil--made her into the shape of a man--breathed down into the nose with the breath a life...He took Him one a Adam's ribs--whittled him a wife. That was Eve. She was a woman."
>
> Steadily sibilant the wind washed through the dry grasses all around, bending them, laying them low, their millions yearning all together.
>
> "You better git, boys . . . tarry not." (227)

Saint Sammy's version of God's rationale for creating man forces us to contrast two different idyllic visions: one of Eden husbanded by Adam (the Old World pastoral), and one of unbroken prairie with all its mixed New World mythology of dreams and idyllic values. This parodic theological idyll, translated through a "sod-buster's" perceptions, is juxtaposed against the narrative agent's voice, which brings back the biblical connotations of the wind as a creating and destroying

spirit, and of the grass as mortal man. Here the wilderness "deity" is the creator of mankind, but it is "bending them, laying them low" with the further connotations of "testing" and "destruction." These different visions of creation and creator are emphasized again by the narrative agent as the boys leave Saint Sammy; the wind is described as "transcendant vibrance filling universe with utter fierceness of its sound, willing grass down in unison, relentless-unstilling--wild" (227-28). Again, this last narrative passage is cut from the shorter standard version, perhaps because a spelling mistake (*transcendent*), a missing article before "universe," and a suspect use of "unison" to mean *en masse* all occur within a few lines. However, a good editor should have merely corrected these problems and allowed the passage to stand due to its ideological importance. In the next paragraph, also cut from the shorter version, the Catholic church's "narrow spire pointing out the dizzy sky" (228) is highlighted against Brian's "forlornness." This passage is filtered through Brian's perceptions, and is quite necessary to understand his inner confusion about the apparent gap between religion and the reality of the prairie.

About half of a page beyond this passage, the narrative voice is still filtered through Brian as the chapter ends, and Sherrill Grace chooses these two paragraphs to analyze "Mitchell's clear awareness of heteroglossia and the internally dialogized aspects of the discourse" (125). She

identifies six different voices as part of the "hidden dialogue" in Brian's meditation: 1) Brian's weaker voice, 2) Brian's stronger voice, 3) Uncle Sean's voice, 4) Uncle Sean's combined with Brian's weaker voice, 5) homophonic narrator, and 6) narrator's combined with Brian's weaker voice (125).

It might not be relevant to repeat her division of the "voices," but note that she complains that the first sentence of the second paragraph in the following passage reverts to a "homophonic narrator" who "speaks for, not with, Brian" (124):

> Saint Sammy was crazy, crazy as a cut calf, Uncle Sean had said. A thing couldn't come closer through a crazy man gone crazy from the prairie. Who cared about anybody living in a piano box on the bald-headed prairie?
>
> And yet for breathless moments he had been alive as he had never been before, passionate for the thing that slipped through the grasp of his understanding and eluded him. If only he could throw his cap over it: if it were something that a person could trap. If he could lie outstretched on the prairie while he lifted one edge of his cap and peeked under to see. That was all he wanted--one look. More than anything! (228-9)

Yes, the passage is dialogized and reflects a number of linguistic sources and voices, but to quibble about the origin of words from that allegedly "homophonic" sentence is to miss the main point about dialogized narration. It does not matter if "passionate" and "eluded" are of a higher diction level than "the thing that slipped." The sensory centre and the cognitive centre are Brian's throughout the passage while the language centre for half a dozen words slips to a higher diction. This is common in describing the thoughts of a character and as in the spirea leaf passage it does not

prevent a dialogic narrative voice from evoking a profound sense of place that includes more than the physical landscape.

After all, when discussing the dialogic distancing of voices, Bakhtin insists on the following qualification as to how these "voices" are created and how they should be critiqued:

> No purely *linguistic* observations, however subtle, can ever uncover this movement and play of authorial intentions as they are at work among different languages [voices] and aspects of languages. . . . One must not forget during this process that the languages introduced into the novel are shaped into artistic images of languages (they are not raw linguistic data), and this shaping may be more or less artistic and successful, may more or less respond to the spirit and power of the languages that are being represented. (*Dialogic* 417)

This passage suggests that distancing narrative voices to dialogize them goes beyond merely choosing mimetic diction, to include many kinds of rhetorical and stylistic strategies ("polemics" for example) used by an author to reflect (directly or less directly) his or her version of the sociolinguistic milieu. That is why some motifs, image clusters, language rhythms, and rhetorical rhythms, as well as the diction, may all be a part of the stylistic distancing and dialogizing of Mitchell's narrative voices, whether they be filtered or unfiltered. Finally, if some readers of Bakhtin continue to insist on defining dialogic narration as only filtered or *literally* mimetic narrative voice even though a liberal reading of Bakhtin's later thoughts on dialogism suggest otherwise, then surely fair-minded readers in the

tradition of Wayne Booth would have to reject such a limited version of dialogism as an unreliable aesthetic standard for narrative discourse, just as the critical consensus rejected narrow versions of Jamesian strictures on narrative voice.

Mitchell's narrative discourse presents a number of focalizers and distinctive filtered voices from a range of characters as well as distinctively styled unfiltered narrative voices. They all lead the reader deeper into the prairie's social and cultural complexities. Thus the dialogized voices in this novel, in both the narrative voices and the dialogue, build that sense of place not only through the diction but also through juxtaposing the regional idyllic impulses with a harder mimetic realism to forge a successful and distinctive mode of dialectical realism.

THEME AND MODE

Thus a closer examination of the dialogized voices and the resulting dialectic helps to clarify Mitchell's thematic development. Some critics have defined themes for this novel that seem to arise mainly from the comic resolution of the novel without taking into consideration the progression of deaths that resolve each climax of Brian's developmental stages. Certainly, a thematic summary could include something on the salutary effects of nature on the maturation and individuation of a young person faced with materialism, intolerance, regimentation, and alienation from the natural

environment (all common characteristics of the Abercrombies, Powellys, and MacDonalds). But to stop there is to ignore the narrative dialectic, and to read it as a sentimental comedy.

Ken Mitchell interprets the novel as more than sentimental comedy, but still he seems to accept some easy thematic assumptions that are products of ignoring the full dialectic of the voices. He suggests that Mitchell employs a theme of "the all-pervading unity of life" (32), and that "nature--Mitchell asserts--is God" (34), and further, "Mitchell has attempted . . . to reconcile the conflict between good and `evil' in the universe" (26). However tempting, all of these thematic simplifications call for serious qualification.

The novel presents nature ultimately as natural--not supernatural despite the biblical imagery. It presents the prairie as partially inscrutable, but not necessarily as the manifestation of a personal God. The significance of the two-headed calf and the accompanying imagery of "slips" (206), not to mention the forced destruction of the rabbits, and the ambivalent nature of the wind highlighted by the final paragraph, all argue against Ken Mitchell's three observations. The dialectic of voices and modes is maintained to the end without the neat ideological synthesis implied by his statements. Brian is separated from the "all-pervading unity of life" precisely because of his rational struggle to make sense of the universe in which he sees the myths and

idyllic notions of his society juxtaposed against death's finality, which has faithfully paced his development.

On the other hand, the dialectical narrative does not quite present the existential tragedy suggested by E.D. Blodgett when he insists that the novel concludes with Brian being "drained of his very self" (Blodgett 200) and that the telephone pole progression image in the final pages (*Who* 343) is a "parody" suggesting "that we suffer birth in order to die" (Blodgett 201). That image might well suggest man's linear orientation to a cyclical nature, and man's vertical perspective in a horizontal landscape (Ricou, *Vertical* 6-9); however, it is difficult to construe this image to suggest that Mitchell is implying that man is ultimately alienated from the prairie, the wind, and the cycle of life and death.

After all, Brian concludes that the meaning for which he searches has something to do with not only "dying" and "being born," but also with "Loving something and being hungry," as well as with "the prairie . . . a meadowlark, a baby pigeon [that he killed accidentally], and a calf with two heads" (343). For Mitchell, each of these represents a larger issue or concept in the dialectic between the idyllic and the naturalistic. Then Brian includes both "the Ben" and "Mr. Digby" in this new congealing meaning towards which he is reaching. Mitchell is suggesting that to understand nature as inclusive of humans (regardless of their various levels of consciousness, "moral" development or cultural sophistication)

is an important step toward understanding the life cycle and our connections to "the living whole" (Mitchell, *Vanishing* 384). This thematic strand is emphasized by the final three images of the graveyard's rich soil, the pilgrim ant, and the wind "breathing up topsoil and tumbleweed skeletons" (344). The suggestion is that the "truant" pilgrimages of our human consciousness and reason, in their quests to accommodate the finality of death, can either alienate us from "the living whole" (as do Powelly's idyllic notions, but also some of Brian's idyllic notions) or reconcile us to the rich ambiguity of the graveyard's "rich" soil.

Digby is the main character who articulates the voice of experience, in harmony with the narrative agent, at times, and as a catalyst to Brian's waning of innocence. In the final passages, Digby contemplates Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" as he contemplates Brian's questions. He then speculates that the boy has "grown up" (340). Again, one senses very little ironic distance between Digby and the implied author. Digby is a mature character foil to an immature but searching protagonist who dynamically develops the capability of handling, in a limited way, the realities of death in life and the inscrutability of his relationship to nature. The epiphanies for Brian and the reader are not always positive but they are significant enough that "the chain of darkness is broken" (*Who*, Preface) occasionally, partially perhaps by our very empathy with Brian's quest, and

by the existential universality of that quest.

As to the lesser issue of the novel's ultimate mode and genre form, probably no critic has articulated the problems and diagnosed the misunderstandings of this particular narrative mode as thoroughly as Harrison. In describing what he considers the dominant mode of the novel he says,

> In sophisticated comedy, the reader is given an ironic awareness that the purification of the world is ritual rather than actual. The scapegoat is not the very evil which has plagued the community but a ceremonial figure. In a comedy such as *Who Has Seen the Wind*, preoccupied with human mortality, the driving out of such figures as Bent Candy and Mrs. Abercrombie signifies not that humanity is redeemed but that the fallen state is to be viewed comically. (W.O. 167)

Yet he concludes his debate with some deference to Blodgett, agreeing that the novel "retains its potentially tragic overtones to the end" (168).

Ordinarily, some readers might well have an aversion to forcing fiction into sharply defined modes or genre forms, especially if the particular fiction in question resists the push. However, some weak readings of the novel seem linked to expectations about certain modes (especially tragic realism) so accurate classification just might aid broader reading strategies in this case. One could describe the novel as having some affinity with both tragic and comic modes marked by a juxtaposition of idyllic impulses against elements of naturalistic realism to enhance the dialectical realism, much as Blake used the *Songs of Innocence* to sharpen the thematic development of the *Songs of Experience*. Brian's individuation

in particular is not established in an exclusively comic mode and certainly not by some transcendental resolution, but neither is it established in an entirely tragic mode. The novel is perhaps best described as a Bildungsroman that operates in a dialectically entwined tragicomic mode.

Thus in this novel, largely through the orchestration of the voices, Mitchell contrasts Old World idyllic notions of a pastoral Deity of edenic nature with local idyllic prairie primitivism, only to then juxtapose them both against a dominant naturalistic realism. He portrays a number of quintessential prairie idyllic impulses arising from such primitivism, but juxtaposes them with the darker natural realities of the prairie, like the finality of death and the ultimate inscrutability of the life-cycle's *raison d'etre*, or lack thereof. The orchestration of the narrative voice resolutely avoids violating the natural order with any transcendental answer to death, yet it also avoids enforcing some existential ideological law as to what the reader must believe. Rather, it offers us the open-ended essence of a maturing boy's search for ultimate knowledge while it undercuts the hopefulness of that "enquiring heart's search for finality." Mitchell admirably orchestrates a believable development of maturation and individuation in Brian, as part of a sophisticated *Bildungsroman*, with a moving dialectic between innocence and experience both in the characters and in the narrative voices.

Chapter 2: W.O. MITCHELL

Part 2: INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MITCHELL CANON

THE KITE AND THE ROSES

It is probably a truism that some of Mitchell's fiction might not deserve the critical attention afforded his first and best novel, but this seems to have obscured the equally true fact that some of his other earlier novels have been unjustly neglected. There are reasons for this that can not be ignored. Many critics judge some of these novels to be flawed aesthetically in rather glaring ways, yet in some of those same novels, strong fiction often rises above those flaws. In his later novels, Mitchell turns more toward dialogue for the orchestration of "voices," while the narration is almost always filtered through protagonists and other characters. The narrative agency that counterpointed the other voices of *Who Has Seen the Wind* with such careful craft and such lyrical power disappears from the later novels. In his better novels, like *The Vanishing Point*, the power of his dialectical realism still strongly develops a sense of place; however, in some of the later novels there are often structural flaws that usually have to do with weak orchestration of mixed modes such as an unsuccessful hybrid of relatively naive comedy with serious comic realism.

Mitchell's second novel, *The Kite*, exemplifies both the power and the weakness; the flaws are easy to identify while

the power of the dialogized voices and the dialectical realism are more challenging to isolate critically, but well worth the effort. Daddy Sherry is a delightful character sometimes tending toward caricature when his antics become more slapstick than realistic. Caricature is not necessarily an unjustifiable violation of mimesis in some kinds of comedy; some of Dickens's fiction, for example, uses minor characters to represent social types to further the mosaic of his setting. I believe this comic licence applies to the cases of Mrs. Abercrombie and Uncle Sean in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, although John Moss disagrees, suggesting they are distracting caricatures (204). However, as a means of representing a major or a central character developed in a genre purporting to be sophisticated comic realism, caricature is sometimes harder to justify.

Although the symbolism of Daddy Sherry smashing the grandfather clock (*Kite* 206) fits well with the development of thematic strands about the ultimate shallowness of social decorum and the tyranny of time in modern consciousness, the cartoon-like nature of his spite and the heavy-handedness of the symbol challenge not only mimesis, but also the willing suspension of disbelief (a different issue). Daddy Sherry's cottage afloat all night in the current of a flooding river is almost pure fantasy, and not only for those who know something about joists and flooring and the behaviour of currents with large square objects with considerable draft and drag. The

slapstick reactions of Daddy and Belva to the adventure, especially the ending of it, unfortunately reinforce the caricature without helping the thematic development.

On the other hand, the novel has narrative passages of satisfying vitality. For example, the memorable tale of Daddy Sherry's goose hunt is set up by some unusual narrative strategy. From the end of chapter six to the beginning of chapter seven, the point of view shifts from an anecdotal monologue by Dr. Harry Richardson (addressed to David Lang, the usual third-person focalizer) to a more supple third person limited omniscience filtered loosely through Harry's eyes and consciousness (rather than David's). This continues for the balance of the goose hunt narrative, from the beginning to the end of chapter seven. Then chapter eight opens with a narrative shift back to Lang as filter, but it continues the doctor's visit from the end of chapter six as Harry concludes his anecdote and takes his leave. This is the standard narrative strategy for the anecdotal and episodic narratives about Daddy Sherry as reported to David Lang by other characters, as in chapter five (young Keith's memorable account of Daddy's trapeze escapade), the last half of chapter nine, and chapter fourteen with its multiple sources for the flood anecdote. These narrative shifts seem to work, since they often suggest the increased distance of David Lang, the writer, reprocessing the twice told tale. After all, tall tales and self-conscious reworking of tales are an important

part of the prairie regional voices as argued by Orm Mitchell in "Tall Tales in the Fiction of W.O. Mitchell" (16-35).

The narrative voice of chapter seven includes an excellent orchestration of anecdotal voices (Rev. Finlay, Hickory Smith, Dr. Richardson) that all contribute to the legendary quality of the goose hunt scene, as well as to the larger distinctive sense of place. The reader feels the final climactic effect of this narrative strategy in the sentence opening chapter eight, as if one has just partaken (in the company of Lang and Richardson) of the supernatural anecdote washed down by the consecrated "Scotch," the essential elements of a holy communion in the late night hotel room above a small town prairie bar. In preparation for this epiphany, the passages that conclude the anecdote describe the Canada Greys with the legendary Old Croaker among them approaching the goose pits where Daddy Sherry, a mere hundred years young, is enthroned in a grave-like goose pit camouflaged by the undertaker's artificial grave sod:

> Down wind they came, closing on the field with such falsetto fury it was hard to say whether man stalked goose or goose stalked man. High over the still decoys and the buried mortals they trailed hysteria, circled lower and returned upwind--shrill hell loosed for recess--wild--wild--bagpipe wild. (88)

Then as Old Croaker descends within range, the impatience of the hunters is almost palpable, as they hold back to honour Daddy with the first shot:

> Harry . . . waited for the flat *whap* of the light twenty-gauge, waited for the old honker to plummet

> earthward. . . . Daddy made no move. . . . Ollie's restraint broke then. Without any aim whatsoever, he machine-gunned the three shells from his automatic shot-gun.
>
> Old Croaker flew on.
>
> Donald Finlay emptied his gun.
>
> Old Croaker flew on.
>
> Harry Richardson felt his Greener kick for each barrel.
>
> From the ancient rear end of Old Croaker two bits of down separated themselves and drifted lazily to earth. . . . Old Croaker's basso taunt drifted back to them--deliberate--quite derisive.
>
> Then Harry heard the honking behind himself. He looked back to a half-resurrected Daddy Sherry. The old man had lifted the bright green grave grass over his shoulders like a shawl. He was laughing. Two old ganders laughed in unison.
>
> They laughed at the doctor.
>
> They laughed at the minister.
>
> They laughed at the undertaker. (89-90)

The narrative has the pacing of the retold, refined, slightly "mythologized" hunting tale, but at the same time the whole passage projects a sensuous immediacy to the eerie sights, sounds, and sensations of an October morning goose pit on the prairie flyway. This time the symbolism of the ancient fate-defying goose and Daddy's laughter from the grave does not detract from the narrative voice's quality, but adds to the theme. Thus, the sense of place is evoked quite successfully through the voices and the narrative voice strategies.

The kite passages that close the novel are handled with equal craft and lyricism, although David's epiphany about the symbolism of the kite might be spelled out a bit too didactically. But even beyond these few stylistic problems, Harrison and others are justified in pointing out that the open thematic questions of *Who Has Seen the Wind* have a scope

and profundity greater than the limited answers of *The Kite* (W.O. 170). Nevertheless, the anecdotal voices and the reprocessing of these voices as dramatic tales develop a significant sense of place due to the juxtaposition of idyllic prairie values with the realities of coping with mortality.

Some brief reference to *Roses Are Difficult Here* (1990) seems in order for three reasons: first, the bulk of the novel was written before the release of *The Vanishing Point* (1973); secondly, the novel deals with the same basic setting and some of the same minor characters as *The Kite*, concentrating on the community values and culture of the archetypal small prairie town more than upon individual quests for enlightenment (as in the later novels); thirdly and most importantly for this study, the theme addresses overtly (at least it begins to) the dialectic between prairie idyllic notions of community and the harsher social realities of prairie life.

Perhaps, if Mitchell in his prime had worked as hard at remaking this novel as he had at reworking *The Alien* (serialized in Macleans in 1953 and 1954) into *The Vanishing Point* (Harrison, "W.O." 172-77), it might have been one of Canadian prairie fiction's great comments on the myth versus the reality of prairie communities. That certainly seems to be the original intention, judging by the structure of the plot and the central conflict between Matt, conservative editor of the small town weekly, *Shelby Chinook*, and Dr. June Melquist, urbane eastern sociologist come to study the

primitive mores of prairie small town life. Yet the result is a narrative that begins with great potential for ironic prairie realism but drifts toward romance in the all-too-frequent pattern of a Nellie McClung prairie novel, like *Sowing Seeds in Danny*. He does not follow through with the insightful realism about prairie communities that one finds in Patricia Blondal's *A Candle to Light the Sun* (1960) or Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*.

Despite the early promises of a serious dialectic between idyllic notions of community and social realism, the novel ends by delivering not a balanced assessment of the prairie community, but rather a populist defence of well established prairie idyll. There is no denying that the community-minded charitable actions, described in Matt's final editorial rebuttal to the sociologist's indictment, do occur in real prairie life. Matt does illuminate aspects of prairie community life that are often missed by the unobservant urban professional; however, Mitchell does not reveal convincingly any significant development of new insight by Matt into his own smugness, not to mention insight into the town's narrow understanding of itself. That would not be negligence if Mitchell had put some emotional and cognitive distance between the implied author and Matt, so that reader could understand the character to have limited understanding of his environment. However, Mitchell presents him as a protagonist who wins the day over a villainous Eastern sociologist,

because his definitive final words on the virtues of the small-town prairie community stand unchallenged by voices revealing more serious social realism. To perceive mankind comically is an invaluable part of the realist's arsenal, but to flirt with naive comic romance when the novel's subject matter has so much potential for social insight, that is to miss a serious opportunity for comic realism.

ON *THE VANISHING POINT*

But the faults with the narrative modes that blur the achievement of these last two novels, are not so apparent in some later novels like *The Vanishing Point* or *Since Daisy Creek*. Both of these novels establish a dialectical mode of social realism, juxtaposing idyllic notions of the Western Canadian wilderness with serious insight into man's relationship with the region's physical and social geography--the nature outside and the nature within.

In fact *The Vanishing Point* establishes several complex but complementary dialectics between idyllic impulses and the dominating aspects of mimetic realism. One is the native dialectic between the idyllic vision of Storm and Misty (a life-giving, life-uniting valley) and the reality of several "Bony Spectres"--disease, alcoholism, incest and the inner-city desperation represented by Norman Catface's world of prostitution and violence. There are several other dialectics between idyll and reality, associated with both native and

white worlds: Rev. Richard Healy's simplistic gospel is juxtaposed to the social complexities of the inner city; Carlyle's chauvinistic naivety about Victoria and "progress" is juxtaposed with the complexity of his own social and psychological progress; a naive faith in white technological solutions for natives is juxtaposed against the realities of white racism, imperialism, and dogmatism; and finally Mitchell juxtaposes the alienation of man from "the living whole" (due to self-conscious reason) against the possibilities of our participation within nature and community. Mitchell employs the motifs of unreliable bridges and distorting mirrors to suggest the nature of these last two dialectics.

Mitchell succeeds in orchestrating an impressive collage of voices, imagery, motifs and conflicts in this novel, while the seriousness, maturity and breadth of his vision, and the profundity of his thematic development could only be thoroughly explored in a study devoted solely to Mitchell. His narrative voice strategies are fairly simple, compared to his previous novels, yet still effective. He faithfully filters the narrative voices through the sensory and cognitive centres of the characters, especially through Sinclair, the protagonist, and also through Archie Nicotine, one of the more brilliantly realized character foils in any fiction or drama.

Carlyle Sinclair is the fallible filter for most of the narration, and the ironic distance between the author and the intelligent but painfully "white" consciousness of Sinclair is

a central narrative strategy until the eleventh hour resolution of the novel with Sinclair's final epiphany. Here the irony moves into the very narrative voice, the filtered perceptions and consciousness of Sinclair, paced by the ceremonial drums of the Stony dances.

The drum motif is developed more fully than even the title imagery. The narrative voice invokes it in the opening paragraph as Sinclair wakes to the drumming of the ruffed grouse--an "invitation to join the living whole" (1). The denouement chapter opens with Sinclair waking from his first "forbidden" night with Victoria: "It was as though his own pulse had drummed him awake; the ruffed grouse of course" (417). The climactic passage, where his depression, his reserve, and his white rational superiority finally break and yield to the invitation of the drums, is well prepared for; it continues the complex dialectics developed throughout the novel between white "civilized" reason and human primordial instincts (not only sexual). Sinclair is not a likely candidate to respond to any drummer. He has already witnessed, with pity and cynicism (in that other climactic tent meeting), the "drums" of Rev. Healy's powerful rhetoric, a simplistic call to emotional "lobotomy" in the paralleled white world of idyll and reality.

The power of Carlyle's change in the final passage is especially enhanced by a previous dialogue between Carlyle and Dr. Peter Sanders, an insightful and empathetic minor

character. The following abridged version highlights some of the ironic distance between the implied author and the protagonist, and begins just after Sinclair has sloughed off the suggestion that he try meeting the Stonys half way by learning their language:

> "And then there's that goddam drum. . . . right from birth they've got that drum..."
> "You're not going to take that from them?"
> "...with their mother's milk--every week--every month--every year--..."
> "Christ, Sinclair--let them keep their drum at least!" . . . . "It is--at least--one thing we didn't give them--along with the D.T.s--TB--V.D. The drum is beautiful."
> "It's lobotomy."
> ". . . every human's entitled to a dram of Lethe now and then. Just take your pick--liquor--drum--Dingle--Esau's Storm and Misty magic . . ."
> "Green lobotomy."
> "Hey-up."
> "*No-watch-es-nichuh*" [Stony for "bullshit"]. (217-18)

With that kind of ironic distance and the obvious room for character development in Sinclair, "lobotomy" can not be taken as Mitchell's final word on the drums, and "green lobotomy" is not Mitchell's final judgement on the Stony version of Eden. Mitchell, as opposed to Carlyle, shows an awareness throughout the novel of the formative role of idyll and mythology in a society's identity and in its value system.

Thus, he sets up Carlyle to answer the native drums--or at very least the ruffed grouse's drums. In the following passages, the drums represent primordial human drives with extra-rational aspects that sometimes seem hostile to the highly developed culture of Western reason. The European West

meets the wilderness West. Mitchell suggests that some of these primordial impulses are toward sexuality, community, and a "fallen" participation in "the living whole." Although the nature of humans also seems to alienate them from readily fulfilling these urges according to Mitchell, he also implicitly recommends a rejection of the simplistic edenic notion of "fallen" by recommending an embrace of "fallen" humanity and its participation in a less than perfect "living whole." Note how he develops aspects of this theme in the following climactic passage filtered through Sinclair's consciousness:

> Soft--distant--the dim pulse came to him. He . . . recognized the bump of the dance drum. . . . Spring's cool breath carried to him the wild drift of the Owl Song pure upon the night.
>
> Before he had reached the bridge over Beulah Creek, he could see the long glow of the dance tent through the trees; magic lantern shadows were thrown against the walls and slope roof, swelled, contracted . . . (410)

Ahead of him are the rites of spring, the fertility rites his society has taught him to avoid; one remembers Fyfe chasing the bee that violated his prize orchid, and his advice to Carlyle not to get emotionally involved. The bridge over Beulah Creek not only continues that rather obvious motif of tenuous bridges between the cultures, but also speaks of a personal bridge for Carlyle; he leaves some of his psychological alienation behind. The magic lantern images remind the reader of his larger than life phallus projection through Aunt Pearl's magic lantern, and thus it evokes all of

the psychologically loaded flashbacks to his sexually repressed childhood.

But the mood of the narrative voice swings back and forth between his white ideology and his primordial impulses, something like Marlow's reaction to the African drums. In the following passage, the dancers are at first a threat to his individuality, and the power of the drums is a threat, in his mind, to the sexually vulnerable Victoria:

> one slowly coiling creature on many tan, bound feet, the dancers shuffled past Carlyle. . . . [H]e caught swift sight of her. . . . [A]lone, Archie Nicotine had said. . . . Fair game for any of them now--one night one--another night another--Jesus! Free in Paradise! (411)

Archie has urged him toward this jealousy by suggesting that she was alone, and vulnerable because sex "comes free in Paradise" (409). Note the ironic name of the reserve.

Throughout the novel, Mitchell has Carlyle repeatedly crying out in silent but anguished apprehension, "little girl lost--dear little lamb, Victoria!"; thus, he sets up a Blakean allusion to the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* (Harrison, W.O. 178). So, it is quite ironic that the fallen "lamb" makes the first overture to him on the dance floor, initiating him gently into the fallen world. He has been living without "Grace" (his dead wife's name), yet alienated from communion with the ordinary fallen world around him by his "white" chauvinistic rationalism. This initiation is introduced quietly by the connotations of "Chastely, side by side, they slid into the reiterative beat of the drum" (414).

Again, the drum is the symbolic opposite to his rationalism.

The drum has ambiguous meanings for him, and this makes the passage more complex. He wants to reject the aspects of mindless escapism that he has always associated with the drum, and the most soaring rhetoric of this passage plays on that pole of the dialectic:

> all were one under the driving drum--under the smashing drum. Who cared now--who cared for tabes and for little sabre-shinned babies in the deep trachoma dark! Who cared now if the belly sang high--if the belly rumbled low. Canvass and rags and cardboard kept you almost warm in the twenty-five below. . . . Thirty in the bucket with the Agent going bail, the grabbing hold of girls and incestuous relations--they are fun--fun--fun. So we lash the hidden instinct wolf to life--we club the mirror--the Methodist glass--we break it--we smash it with disdain! (414-15)

That truth, that partial truth about "this dram of Lethe," is one of Carlyle's stumblingblocks to learning the new and unfamiliar dances ahead of him. To Mitchell's credit, he focuses on the native dancer as a fallible human being rather than just a symbol of the wilderness. He reveals the signs of Matthew Bear's vanity as he pumps himself through the sensual Prairie Chicken Dance, and the reader remembers Matthew's mother mocking his cowardice previously, calling him a great chicken dancer. His vanity, and the vanity of the escapism are accentuated by Matthew's final slip as he accidentally "fell flat to earth. . . . the faultless Prairie Chicken Dance was over and done" (416). This is Mitchell's carnivalesque undercutting of a carnivalesque event.

Toward the other pole of the dialectic, Mitchell

concludes by having Carlyle soften his cynicism before leaving the dance for his bed, with Victoria. He accepts his bonds with the natives, he in his fallen state and they in theirs:

> How had he arrived here in this tent flickering with lamp and firelight? He did belong with them. A wild and distant drum had pulsed for him and Mate, when they had stood with total thrust of sun on their defenceless heads. Together they had discovered that they were both alien from and part of a living whole. (415)

The narrative voice still filtered through Carlyle's epiphany-driven consciousness is careful to elaborate on the meaning of "alien from." He does not suggest that this refers to humans rejecting their obvious relationship to nature, nor does it refer directly to their "east of Eden" status. He specifies that it has to do with the human ability and instinct (unlike other animals) to build "bridges between himself and other men so that he could walk from his own heart into other hearts" (415), a reference to possibilities of human communication, participation, and community beyond the mere altruism of Sinclair's earlier attitudes. So "alien from" refers less to alienation from nature and more to a superior human potential.

Although this is a less memorable expression of the idea than Steinbeck's concept of "Manself" in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Sinclair's insight points to our potential for significant communion with each other and with "the living whole" (415) meaning something more than physical responsibility, since some other life forms manage that as well or better than we do. Sinclair develops toward emotional and uninhibited

participation in the community and in human relationships. His meditation suggests that being "both alien from and part of a living whole" has a lot to do with man's complex interpersonal relationships and his conscious recognition of his failure in relationships to the "whole," to his fellow human beings, and to community. Thus, the phrase "alien from," in its reference to superior human potential for empathy and communication (as opposed to alienation from nature) really is part of the ideal or idyllic aspects of the dialectic as opposed to the naturalistic. In this case, as in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, the dialectic's synthesis embraces not only aspects of hard-nosed realism, but also some of the idyllic impulses as laudable ideals for fallen humanity, while rejecting the more deceptive and naive idyllic impulses.

Thus this dialectical voice continues the central strategy juxtaposing idyllic notions with mimetic realism, and in the tradition of sophisticated comedy, Sinclair surrenders to the "bruising drum that shattered time and self and all other things that bound" (416) him. This does not mean that he adopts Esau's Storm and Misty magic or a native transcendentalism, but it does mean that he at least joins the rites of spring symbolized by the mating call drumming of the ruffed grouse. There is something carnivalesque about this, a deliberate flouting of the social mores and social decorum of his white society, a breach of Fyfe's rule about not getting involved personally. However, this is a carnivalesque

mood more like the ending of Heller's *Catch-22* where one knows that the exuberance of the denouement has not lessened the tragedy of war caused by military and cultural imperialism. Likewise, white racism, economic and cultural imperialism, and the resulting social chaos in both races are all tragedies that are not muted but underlined by the carnivalesque mood of the resolution and the denouement. The symbolic regeneration of Carlyle by his participation in the fertility rites, the symbolic regeneration of Paradise as the Beulah springs overcome the blockage caused by white technology, and the ambiguously symbolic resurrection of Archie's truck are all part of a comic and carnivalesque resolution that has more integrity of voice and integration of motifs than Daddy Sherry's smashing of the grandfather clock.

Again, the sense of place is evoked not only by brilliantly realized dialogue and character development, but also through intelligent narrative filters. Both the superb dialogue and the narrative voice develop a true dialectic between a welter of idyllic impulses and mimetic realism, where the synthesis rejects the dross of naive idyll, but embraces the fallen yet honourable reality of a humanity "both alien from and part of the living whole" (415).

MITCHELL'S LATER NOVELS

How I Spent My Summer Holidays (1981), *Since Daisy Creek* (1984), *Lady Bug, Lady Bug* (1988), and *For Art's Sake* (1992)

focus increasingly on psychological development and impairment in a single central character or two. With the exception of *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, these novel do not normally attempt much broader social commentary than can be inferred from the generalization of those single case studies. Generally, the last two novels do not seem to address the prairie community with the deliberate social and cultural consciousness of the earlier novels. The thematic scope of these psychological novels is narrower and understandably their impact on regional and national literature is less than that of *Who Has Seen the Wind* or *The Vanishing Point*, with their broader sociological and ideological implications.

So this study does not deal with *Lady Bug, Lady Bug* nor with *For Art's Sake* (1992), not just because Mitchell seems to have lost some of the power in his narrative voices and some of his mimetic authenticity in dialogue, but also because these novels have less of a focus on the idyllic impulses and mythologies that characterize the regional culture and society. Thus, at least for the purposes of this study, they lack the social and cultural impact derived from the juxtaposition of the idyllic and the mimetic, characteristic of his strongest novels. These points do not automatically denigrate Mitchell's place in Canadian Literature; after all, Tolstoy's reputation was not hurt greatly by the change in focus of some of his later fiction after *Anna Karenina*. So Mitchell's reputation in Canadian fiction rests securely on

Who Has Seen the Wind, The Vanishing Point, and some very good, if occasionally flawed novels before the 1988 release of *Ladybug, Ladybug*.

Of the two novels, *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* and *Since Daisy Creek*, the former has received more critical attention partially due to Macmillan's successful promotion of the novel as a kind of sequel to *Who Has Seen the Wind*. A Macmillan dust cover from a later novel still spouts the official hype as follows: "Complementing that book [*Who Has Seen the Wind*] (as *Huckleberry Finn* complements *Tom Sawyer*), is his 1981 best-seller *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, hailed by some critics as his finest novel." I think it is neither his finest novel nor is it comparable to *Huckleberry Finn*. *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* is not more adult, nor more seriously literary, nor more realistic (as implied by that analogy) than *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and the latter is denigrated by any suggested parallels with *Tom Sawyer* in mode or in thematic scope.

How I Spent My Summer Holidays has a darker vision than his first novel, but it does not have the scope nor the profundity of the first. The imagery is overt and heavy-handed, almost always alluding to the classical and biblical Old World mythology, like Eden and the Fall, and the standard Freudian interpretation of the Fall. Since the narrative voice is first person, one might grant that it should be dialogic by definition, yet the narrator is rather pushy at

times with the older reflective voice analyzing and directing the meaning of the boyhood experiences.

In that sense, this is a much less subtle narrative voice than the unfiltered omniscient voice in *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Consider the following passage where the implied author wants to make sure his readers have noted the cave imagery and the serpent imagery (which are hard to miss):

> I had thought that Austin was the only victim. All of us were. We simply hadn't noticed the adult footprints in our child caves . . . left by guardian trespassers. . . . They wanted only to make it safe for their vulnerable young, to clear it of danger. They did not know, nor did we, that they could be carriers, unintentionally leaving serpents behind, coiled in a dark corner, later to bite and poison and destroy. (177)

The welter of mythic and Freudian imagery structures the fiction rather unsubtly; yet the novel does address the reality of male sexual repression in an inhibited society, and is probably more interesting philosophically than his two most recent novels.

Harrison does a thorough job of identifying the image structures and the uncharacteristic tragic mode (W.O. 179-87). He also identifies what is likely the major flaw of the novel, and that has to do with the narrative strategy. The narrator would seem to be an unreliable narrative voice because of his inhibitions and misogyny (W.O. 186), yet Mitchell allows that narrative voice to do all the major thematic interpretation for us. Mitchell's male characters experience a rather traditional descent from innocence to experience through

inhibited carnal knowledge, and the narrator, as Harrison suggests, "seems to blame his fall and the terrors of guilt and shame which retarded his passage from childhood to manhood on matriarchal domination" (187). Though the narrator alludes to female archetypes in classical and biblical mythology, he fails to represent directly or ironically any positive or alternative views of the female roles in male socialization and individuation. Harrison concludes his critique by suggesting that,

> This poses a problem for the integrity of the novel. While the structure suggests that the narrator arrives at a condition of tragic awareness, he is actually left in fundamental confusion about the world he delivers to us. (187)

Although there is clearly some ironic distance between author and narrator, and some dialectic between mythology and realism, the mythology and the dialectic are perhaps less regionally distinctive than some other dialectics explored in this study. The novel is more conventionally modern in its reliance on classical and biblical mythological motifs and structure, and less interesting for this study perhaps because the sense of place does not depend on the exploration or juxtaposition of distinctively regional idyllic impulses. Of course, Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* also relies on some Biblical allusion and Old World mythology, but David's particular version of a rural Arcadian utopia has some distinctively Canadian and regional overtones that give it special importance for this study.

In contrast to *How I Spent My Summer Holidays, Since Daisy Creek* has a more naturally developed imagery and a less intrusive structure. This is partially because of the well handled ironic distance between the implied author and the narrative voice filtered through the protagonist. Mitchell characterizes Dr. Colin Dobbs confidently, partially through the engaging character foils of Archie Nicotine again, and of Annie, Dobbs's daughter. Dobbs is an archetypal misogynist male. He has a flawed ego and a lack of roots, not just paternally; that is, he is a literal bastard (and literally a bastard), but he also lacks mythological and cultural roots.

The grizzly that mauls Dobbs is central to the greater narrative strategy. It represents metonymically the real wilderness, while the grizzly hide, which is fraudulently sold by the taxidermist's grandson to an American trophy hunter, represents the flaws in the Great White Hunter mythology of wilderness and manhood. Dobbs's obsession with reclaiming that particular hide threatens to derail his social and psychological rehabilitation so carefully nurtured by his daughter, Annie. She is possibly the most fully developed and believable female character in the Mitchell canon.

Thus the imagery of the grizzly and the quest for the lost grizzly hide set up a dialectic between that wilderness primitivism, previously discussed, and the mimetic realism typical of Mitchell's best fiction. The primitivist and idyllic notion here is of an omnipotent wilderness that tries

the physical and spiritual mettle of men and sometimes even bestows an identity upon the worthy or the properly initiated. This idyll seems to be the only "secular scripture" or ideological roots to which the protagonist can cling. He is, after all, Eastern born without prairie roots. Both Nicotine and Annie continually challenge the quality and truth of Dobbs's mythology and it is, of course, found wanting.

The narrative voice is not the dominant feature of this novel the way it is in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, but it is used effectively to support the dramatic and believable dialogue, which carries the main weight of the dialectic and the character development. The repartee and pacing remind one of Mitchell's talents in writing for the stage. The third-person filtered narrative voice is used consistently and judiciously to introduce a dramatic scene, or to reveal the flash-back memory patterns that haunt Dobbs with failures as a father, as a husband, as a boy, and as a "man" (the "great white hunter" version of manhood).

The ironic distance between the voice of the protagonist's consciousness and the understanding of the implied author is consistent and well controlled, as is evident in the following passage about Dobbs's rage toward the American hunter who defrauded him of his grizzly hide:

> He did know one thing: he had never hated anyone else in his whole life as much as he now hated that Minneapolis son-of-a-bitch, who had bought false importance from that falcon Frankie! What a glorious, Nimrodian fiction he must have built for himself by now. How carefully he must have

> rehearsed hunting bull-shit to shovel it out again and again and again! . . . .
>
> How many times had the phoney prick leaned back in his cowhide chair, probably with a neat bourbon in his hand, cigar smoke blue around his head, telling his cronies how she had charged him and charged him again, while he stood fearless, unflinching and alone, up to his fat ass in snow, risking his very life in the remaining wilderness of Canada! (245)

This is typical of the bitter and colourful tones of this narrative voice, and typical of the protagonist's ironically insightful understanding of other people's motivations, while he fails to understand his own motivations, values, and identity problems. This also highlights his partial awareness of the wilderness myth at whose altar he has been worshipping; its verbal irony suggests the deeper irony of the narrative distancing, as well as suggesting the possibility of Dobbs's subsequent insights and character development.

This is sophisticated, serious comic realism, as the protagonist shows promise of being redeemed from his macho mythology by his lost lamb of a daughter, whom he tries to take with him into an idyllic version of men and wilderness (see Harrison, W.O. 189). The narrative mode again is that juxtaposition of mimetic realism with the primitivist idyllic impulses. The key catalysts in the dialectic are the not-so-innocent Annie and the hilarious myth-debunking Archie Nicotine, both of whom greatly enhance a distinctive and realistic sense of place. Archie, as in *The Vanishing Point*, is a comic antidote to white mythology and to the wilderness idyll. The comedy of manners surrounding the pretention of

University academia and of the legal system is heightened by Archie's earthy confidence in who he is, and who he is not.

A SUMMARY OF MITCHELL'S MODES

At least four of Mitchell's better novels, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *The Vanishing Point*, *The Kite*, and *Since Daisy Creek*, (and to a lesser extent, *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*) all juxtapose idyllic impulses, often born of the local region, against mimetic realism to develop a strong sense of place (both of the geographic and the social milieu). The result is fiction quite different from Sinclair Ross's mode and tone in *As For Me and My House*, but no less profound in its search for insight into the relationships between humans and landscape, and between individuals and communities.

This distinctive mode of dialectical realism often depends on chronicling the effects on prairie society of regional idyllic notions. Particularly in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *The Vanishing Point*, and *Since Daisy Creek*, the sense of place is influenced substantially by idyllic notions arising from primitivism or regional wilderness idyll. Mitchell's fiction illuminates some of the idyllic impulses and myths that motivate the values and mores of the prairie region for better or for worse. He suggests that these impulses help to create our tragic, our humorous, and our ironic struggles to fit the real prairie into the mixed mythologies of the Old World and the New World.

When Mitchell juxtaposes idyllic impulses against mimetic realism, the synthesis usually results in a stronger more profound realism; however, although the synthesis is meant to reveal the weaknesses and naivety of some idyllic notions, it is also meant to try all the ideals in the fire of the realist dialectic to see which can shed the naive dross and be forged into refined and valuable ideals for a practical prairie society. This aspect of the dialectic is clearly evident in *The Vanishing Point* and also in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and it is definitely a part of Alistair MacLeod's dialectical mode in some of the fiction examined in chapter four of this study.

It should not be surprising then that Mitchell as fiction editor of *MacLeans* in the late Forties, should spot a similarly forged sense of place in some of the short fiction submitted to him by a new writer by the name of Ernest Buckler (Bissel 59); his contributions to the development of this mode of dialectical realism are featured in the following chapter.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

Chapter 3: E. BUCKLER: VOICE OF EXILE IN CANAAN

THE CANAAN CONCEPT

David Canaan is the name of Ernest Buckler's protagonist in his first and most prestigious novel, *The Mountain and the Valley*. The name of Canaan in the early biblical narratives has idyllic connotations of mythological proportions, very much like Eden or Arcadia. The idyllic belief that sustains the Israelites throughout their wilderness experiences is a belief in Canaan, a "land of promise" flowing with milk and honey, a restored Eden of prosperity and community in place of bondage. Of course, only two of the twelve spies uphold the idyllic vision of their leader, while the ten with realistic fears report not only the grapes but also the giants and a land that "devours its inhabitants" (Num. 13.32, New RSV). Thus the dialectic between the idyllic impulses and realism is a well established motif in our tradition, and these connotations of Canaan are important in identifying the theme and mode in this novel.

The Nova Scotian rural communities that inspire Buckler's fictional voices have a strong Old World idyllic heritage in their literary tradition. Acadia and the Annapolis Valley, for example, are often presented as a New World Arcadia or at least as part of the Garden Mythology. So the rural maritime idylls (excluding Newfoundland's) are not foreign to the

pastoral notions of a utopian Canaan of the New World, flowing with milk and honey and community. Nevertheless, just as some saw Canaan's darker realistic side, so too, some Maritime writers have understood their region's socioeconomic deprivation to be a reality often at odds with the pastoral ideal.

This study argues that Buckler's best fiction juxtaposes this idyllic heritage with a darker mimetic realism, especially in *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952). This is a seminal novel in the development of modern Canadian fiction that went a long way to establish this alternative mode of dialectical realism in the tradition of *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *La Petite Poule d'eau* (1950). Unlike Roy's and Mitchell's comic and tragicomic novels, Buckler's novel seems to pioneer a more ironic and tragic mode (as part of this juxtaposition of realism with idyllic impulses), breaking ground for later writers like Alistair MacLeod, Susan Kerslake (*Middlewatch*, 1976), Donna Smith (*Quilt*, 1982) and others.

D.G. Jones, in *Butterfly On Rock*, might be the first critic to refer to the connotations of "Canaan" in *The Mountain and the Valley* when he comments on David Canaan's climactic death on the mountain, saying, "Like Moses, he shall not enter the promised land" (25). In this novel, the "land of promise" concept develops into a more complex pastoral vision than merely Edenic landscape. Alan Young's "The Pastoral Vision of Ernest Buckler in *The Mountain and the*

Valley" (its conclusions are debated later) identifies at least four possible aspects of complex pastoral impulses: the geographically pastoral, the sociologically pastoral, the chronologically pastoral, and the morally pastoral (219). Buckler evokes all of these kinds of impulses in that his protagonist's version of a rural utopia ("Canaan") addresses notions of idealized community, idealized moral development, idealized time (past honoured over present), as well as idealized landscape.

David's "Canaan concept" is part of a Maritime Arcadia idyll not just inherited from the biblical and classical idyllic archetypes, but also from local notions of the idyllic as reflected in the region's "secular scriptures" (Frye *Secular* 6-9)--that is, in the region's literary tradition. T.C. Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*, Thomas McCulloch's *The Stepsure Letters*, and Joseph Howe's *Western and Eastern Ramblings: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia* are examples of nineteenth-century Atlantic literature that either ironically addressed the Maritime Arcadia idyll or promoted it (in Howe's case). A general awareness of it is assumed in almost all Maritime literature. Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests that Howe's pastoral impulses "reappear in Montgomery's Avonlea, Raddall's Kingsbridge, Roberts's Ancient Wood, MacLennan's Margaree" (*Under* 16) and that this pastoral "becomes the microcosmic Eden . . . of Macphail and Buckler," although a fallen Eden in their cases (16).

The geographical or landscape pastoral impulses articulated in Buckler's fiction (as in most of the Maritime tradition excluding Newfoundland) are significantly different from idealizations of the wilderness in the western parts of the continent that were settled two centuries later than this area, and significantly different from the idealization of a sentient but adversarial sea in Newfoundland--for example, in Norman Duncan's *The Way of the Sea* (1903). About these maritime pastoral impulses Janice Kulyk Keefer writes:

> [There is] a peculiarly European response to nature. One looks in vain through the pages of most Maritime literature, for prints of Warren Tallman's wolf in the snow. (14-15)

She, too, specifically excludes Newfoundland's literature from this generality (4).

The allusion to Tallman's "Wolf In the Snow" means that she, too, does not agree that Tallman can support his thesis, about European man as a victim of a hostile North American landscape (symbolized by the wolf), by characterizing David Canaan as a victim of alienation and isolation from his physical environment. Neither the carefully husbanded family farm nor David's zealously revered pastoral valley could be construed as hostile wilderness. The mountain, of course, is the place of death for both David and Joseph, his father, but not for others like Anna. Joseph and David bring the seeds of their deaths with them up the mountain. Joseph brings his unarticulated marital frustrations, while David brings his tragic ambitions and his self-deceiving idealism. Most

critics now agree that just as David's physical nemesis is his heart, so too, his nemesis thematically is his metaphorical heart rather than the external mountain. The antagonist is not the external landscape but the internal mountain.

David's central conflict with this illusive antagonist is symbolically represented by the mountain and the valley. For him, the valley represents natural verdure and nurture, idealized family and community, and in short--all of the rural Maritime idyll. But for the reader, the mountain represents a broader panoramic view of that narrow pastoral valley and the Canaan idyll, a view which David never fully achieves. It represents the necessity of leaving the valley for that broader perspective necessary to leaders and liberators. But although it ironically represents David's potential, his coveted fame and authority, his "future" education, and his "higher" vision, it also represents the ironic shortcomings of the visionary leader, and his fated failure to personally enter the land of promise, just as Mt. Nebo represents the same in the story of Moses. The conflict between "mountain" and "valley" is foreshadowed by our cognitive ironic distance from David in the following passage when he can not explain to Anna his refusal to leave the valley for school:

> (He couldn't explain to her how he'd have the best education in the world anyway. His *certainty* of that glossed over the contradiction between going away to get it and the unalterable feature of staying here; but that wasn't a thing he could make plain). (131)

It is, of course, a tragic mountain of ironic ideals, and an

unrealized land of promise that he glimpses in the end.

The key here is that the allusion in the name, Canaan, does not refer so much to the real Annapolis Valley, nor even to the novel's fictional valley, but to an idyllic ideology of "Canaan," a pastoral utopian valley envisioned by David Canaan that is at odds with the reality. His mission is to restore Canaan to his people. Borrowing Young's categories, one perceives that David develops a complex pastoral ideology including sociological, chronological, moral, and geographical aspects. This pastoral virtually becomes his religious ideal, his promise land. This is revealed almost exclusively through the particular narrative voice that is filtered through David's perceptions and consciousness.

David sees himself as a kind of Moses or spiritual liberator for his people, the valley community. Many passages about his relationship with others or the community obliquely suggest this, but a couple of passages are more direct. The first comes early on as he discovers the power of art--of the words and the stage--as he prepares himself for the drama:

> He commanded the silence now, surely, masterfully. Now they all listened as if to someone who had come home from glory in a far place. . . . He knew how they were looking at him. They'd looked at him that way the day he calculated a rafter's length down to the fraction of an inch, by right-angled triangles. (80)

This is David's usual potent mixture of fantasy and reality; the crowd's awe and his command of his relationship with the crowd are both fantasy. Throughout the book he has a faith in

some sort of fate that will bring events together and push him into the ultimate place of recognition and leadership for his people. He thinks, "He'd take them with him always, in their watching. Closer somehow *because* they followed. It would be like the burning loyalty to his father" (81).

Another more overt allusion to his "Moses" or "land of promise" vision comes when he is on the mountain finally, and like Moses on Mt. Nebo, he is granted a final glimpse of Canaan, or the "land of promise"--the ideal community that he has planned for his people. Again, the vision of his leadership involves his ultimate calling to the power of the written word, which he fantasizes as being received by the people as an almost oracular revelation. As tangible evidence of this power, he recalls how he composed a petition to the government for the men of the village:

> When he read it back to them they heard the voice of their own reason speaking exactly in his. Their warm wonder at his little miracle of finding the words for it that they themselves couldn't find, or recognize for the words of their own thoughts until they heard him speak them, made him and them so fluid together that it worked in him like a kind of tears. (298)

The full irony of this climactic passage and the distancing of this narrative voice from the implied author is explored more fully in subsequent analysis.

These leadership aspirations within David are complemented by his perceptions of his people's "falling away" from community values and the pastoral ideal (his Canaan concept). For example, Buckler reveals two principles of

David's idyllic vision of community to us: firstly, through his repeated thoughts about Herb Hennessey's tragic isolation from the community's warmth and support, and secondly, through his youthful reflections on the perfection of marriage. When he announces to Effie that they would be married someday, he contemplates an idyllic analogy that marriage, "was like a house. You could go in and close the door. The lamp would not flicker in any breeze" (47).

Ironically, he never experiences marriage and he becomes increasingly alienated from the community, like the old bachelor, Herb Hennessey; however, at first David sees only the community's alienation from the ideals, and does not understand his own exile within the community and his own violations of Eden, like his betrayals of Effie. Just following a passage where the omniscient narrative agent reveals to the reader David's growing isolation from his neighbours, the narrative voice, filtered through David, contemplates how "his neighbours had changed as the village had changed" (229). He then enumerates the physical encroachments of outside industrial society and reflects:

> With this grafting from the outside world, the place itself seemed older. . . . And the people lost their wholeness. The valid stamp of the indigenous. . . . They were . . . veined with the shaly amalgam of replica. (229)

Again, closer to his epiphany about his own false premises and failures, he contemplates his valley, "how the knitted warmth between its people had ravelled, until each was almost as

alone in his own distraction now as the city people were" (261). In each case Buckler juxtaposes the idyllic vision with a narrative passage that reveals a starker parallel reality about David. In the case of the marriage ideal, he contrasts this to the communication problems and limitations of the marriage of David's parents (47-50), whose behaviour David unwittingly emulates to some extent. So the ultimate irony is not just due to the implicit analogy between the valley community and "Canaan," but rather to the irony of the "Moses" complex and the pastoral ideologies struggling within the tragically flawed ego of David Canaan.

Further to the implicit Moses motif, critics are divided on the point of just how close David Canaan comes, at the close of the novel, to being a deliverer or to being capable of leading anyone toward a promised land. The division arises at least partially because of two potentially climactic moments in the narrative: the first occurs when David observes Toby's final departing train, when Toby's failure to watch for a final farewell gesture lights the fuse of a dramatically anti-pastoral epiphany for David, where he goes so far as to slash at the parsnips, symbolically attacking his carefully ordered field and, by extension, his carefully ordered idyll (278). The second climax comes when David ascends the mountain and seemingly glimpses the "whole" of the promised land one last time.

The novel has spawned amazingly divergent interpretations

depending on which of these two epiphanies is emphasized. Both the extreme pastoral and the extreme ironic mode interpretations seem to ignore, for different reasons, the mitigating influence of the first anti-pastoral epiphany upon the final scene. Thus some interpreters see David as a genuinely artistic Moses figure whose death on the mountain with Canaan in sight is tragic but also heroic after his years of struggle in a psychological, social, and creative wilderness. Others, mainly later critics, would argue that David's "Canaan concept" is totally ironic and without substance, and that if he is compared to Moses at all, it should be the early deluded Moses, whose own people in bondage do not recognize him as a potential deliverer. Some of these critics like Douglas Barbour (64-75) do not see him as a particularly empathetic protagonist partially aware of his weaknesses, but as a victim of his own (or his society's) narrowness. This study argues that close analysis of the narrative voices (distancing strategies, imagery, etc.) helps to mediate this debate by correlating the thematic development of these epiphanies. In the process, the analysis supports the thesis that Buckler further develops the mode of dialectical realism which juxtaposes idyllic impulses with mimetic realism to develop a distinctive sense of place.

INTERPRETATIONS OF CANAAN: PASTORAL VERSUS IRONIC MODE

The radical differences between critics in their readings

of this novel have a lot to do with the complexity of the narrative strategy. Buckler scorned the Hemingway method of an objective narrative voice that avoided direct exploration of consciousness, where action and dialogue were totally responsible for characterization. To Buckler, the narrative voice's thorough exploration of the character's motivation and consciousness was an essential narrative strategy for the modern psychological novel and for serious fiction in general (Buckler, *Mountain* ix). Understanding the narrative voice strategies in the psychological novel is often crucial to correct interpretation, as we have witnessed in the various interpretations of narrative reliability in Ross's *As For Me and My House*. The critic's judgement about the kind and degree of distance between the author and the narrative filters is as crucial in *The Mountain and the Valley* as it is in Ross's first person narration; however, critics did not explore the amount of ironic distance that Buckler intended until John Orange's thesis on Buckler in 1970 (Orange 31).

But a closer look at the novel's narrative strategy was not really inspired until publication of Douglas Barbour's article "David Canaan: the Failing Heart," which declares that a better reading of the ironic mode should reveal David as a selfish, self-deluding, dangerously immature, failed artist, and that the final so called "epiphany" on the mountain only reinforces his delusions and the irony (74). To understand how radical a reading this seemed to some at the time, one

must look at previous critical statements by some of the foremost Buckler critics like Alan Young and Claude Bissel.

In 1973, in "The Pastoral Vision of Ernest Buckler," Young says,

> his eventual climb to the summit of the mountain provides the looked for symbolic demonstration of his coming to terms with his self and his heritage. . . . the climax of his [Buckler's] protagonist's spiritual development. (222)

This sounds as though Young and Barbour are not referring to the same novel. One must hasten to add that Young later defers to some of Barbour's arguments partly on the corroborative evidence of Buckler's own letters about the novel (Young, Note 245). Bissel says, in his 1961 introduction to the novel, "he [Buckler] has written a rural idyll" (Buckler, *Mountain* viii). Again he says, "it is a novel written in praise of the family" (xi). He does address the darker side of the novel, but his summary is stated thus:

> This is a study in the power of the group, of the way in which human beings living in separate worlds are yet made one with each other.
>
> It is the very strength and sureness of Buckler's treatment of the family that makes the last section of the book something of an anti-climax. . . . The study of human community threatens to become a study of human isolation. But this cannot destroy the haunting beauty of the book in its entirety, a magnificent paean to the wonder and innocence of youth. (xii)

Barbour challenges most of this analysis, especially about the family and community, stating unequivocally that the novel "*is* a study of human isolation" (64).

An analysis of the narrative strategy and style can

reveal that Barbour is basically right about the necessity of reading considerable ironic distance between Buckler and the narrative voice filtered through David Canaan, but that Alan Young is also partially right when he says that the novel "is a fine example of pastoral impulse" (220). It cannot be logically read as both ironic mode fiction and also pastoral mode, but it can be read as social and psychological realism employing a dialectical mode which juxtaposes, through ironic distance, the pastoral impulses of the protagonist with mimetic realism in order to reveal more realistic depths about the values and social culture of the region.

Young comes close to this insight when he defines a sophisticated "post-Romantic" pastoral as "a journey from childhood to maturity and from innocence to experience" (pastoral 221). But any theorist on genre would complain that this loose definition of a modern pastoral could describe anything from a typical nineteenth-century *bildungsroman* to Laurence's *The Diviners*. The idea of using pastoral impulses in a realistic mode as opposed to the pastoral or idyllic mode is key to understanding both the mistakes and the insights of Young and Bissel. Young, for example, documents the pastoral characteristics of idyllic community in Buckler's valley in the following passage, suggesting these present a "moral" pastoral pattern, although one could easily analyze them as a sociological pastoral pattern. He cites the following:

> such communal rituals as the annual tending of the graveyard (ch. XII), the building of a church (p.

> 30), care of the bereaved (p. 42 ff.), quilting parties (p. 57), breaking out the roads (p. 74), . . . and house-warming. (Pastoral 221).

One could add to this the community and family rituals of butchering, the sharing of garden produce, the community division of wood-lot resources, etc. These are pastoral *and* mimetic facts about Buckler's Valley and rural Nova Scotia between the wars. Buckler, as well as his protagonist, has been known to mourn the passing of such a life-style, especially in *Ox Bells and Fireflies,* which is more descriptive and expository rather than narrative and follows a tradition of idyllic reminiscence and meditation like Thoreau's *Walden.*

But in *The Mountain and the Valley,* Buckler is careful not to confuse some very real pastoral ideals, which exist in maritime community and culture, with a sentimental mode of pastoralism that views real rural life through rose-tinted glasses. However, his main narrative filter, David Canaan, often does see through such rose-tinted glasses both when looking at the landscape and at his community. This ironic distance between the implied author and David is documented correctly by Barbour, although he is somewhat insensitive, arguably, to the kinds of distancing that are involved in the narrative strategy. This is expanded and debated in the subsequent analysis in the next section on "Identifying the Tragic Flaw in Canaan."

With some good dialectical argument, Barbour vigorously

debates a number of critics. He points out some general and specific problems with Atwood's "victim" thesis, in *Survival*. He argues that David is not a victim of the Canadian landscape (Atwood's "thesis wrap" for all Canadian protagonists), but a victim of his own alienating faults (Barbour 67). Today, *Survival* seems an easy target, but he also points out that Bissell's description of this fiction as a pastoral-like novel "in praise of family" needs a lot of qualification. He rightly suggests that the novel's form is not pastoral but ironic and that "in praise of family" ignores important characterization such as "Martha's capacity for self-inflicted jealous pain, and her ability to use silence as a weapon" (70), which are faults inherited by David. His larger point is that this "Edenic" family has a good deal of the fall already within it. Certainly this is true for David, since he often seems unaware of the fruits of his own "tree of knowledge." This irony, Barbour convincingly argues, is central to Buckler's intent.

IDENTIFYING THE TRAGIC FLAW IN CANAAN

However, Barbour does not seem to see any reason for empathy beyond the cognitive irony in David's ambitions to become a leader and communicator for the community toward restoring and establishing his "Canaan" vision. Barbour does not recognize any significant maturing in David's ideals, nor does he credit David with any serious vision for his valley

community, pastoral or otherwise. In fact, he identifies David's tragic flaw as utter selfishness (71), recognizing no altruistic motivation, and in this conclusion Barbour's arguments are the most vulnerable. He certainly provides enough examples of selfish behaviour, but he often does not balance these fairly with Buckler explorations of David's motivations, recriminations, guilt, and growth.

The central argument here is that Barbour, while recognizing the ironic distancing between the author and the protagonist, does not differentiate between ironic distance created by a disparity in knowledge (insight) and ironic distance created by a disparity in emotion (as opposed to empathy). Buckler distances the filtered narrative voice from the author by allowing the reader to know all kinds of incriminating and paradoxical things about David as he matures. But along with this he attempts to cut the emotional distance to a minimum by a kind of naked stream-of-consciousness narrative voice. This cognitive flow includes stream of conscience, stream of perception, stream of emotion (pride, anger, delight, sexuality, ambition, altruism) all uncensored, raw, irrational, sometimes fleeting, but an honest reflection of the fallen mind. By this attempt at pulling the reader into the perceptions, cognitive processes, and ego of a young genius (see *Mountain* 87), Buckler wants to present a sympathetic but uncompromising documentation of the developing mind-sets in progressive chapters of the young boy, the

adolescent, the youth, and the young man, not as he should be, but as he really is.

Buckler expects the reader to empathize with the raw mimetic chronicling of that naked, hyper consciousness even if we do not identify with the resulting adolescent behaviour and self-deception. For example, after some sexual banter a fourteen-year-old David learns unexpectedly that his older brother has just lost his virginity: "It was like a slap. David felt small and strange. . . . He felt betrayed. He felt almost a sudden hatred of Chris" (100). The reader is expected to empathize with the confusion and sensitivity of a pubescent boy, but then the sibling rivalries and insecurities of that age begin to surface and Buckler records his unfettered and uncensored imagination:

> He'd do it now all right, he thought, lying in bed. He'd get even with Chris. He planned it feverishly, lying there. He planned Effie's part as well as his own. . . . He'd show them whether he was a kid or not. He'd do it so many more times than Chris, so many more times than anyone else. (101)

The reader can not like his reaction, but Buckler expects us to empathize with his inadequate preparation to deal with the revelation, and we understand his sibling rivalry and sexual insecurity.

When an author distances the narrative voice from the reader by an ironic gap of knowledge or insight, yet tries to close the emotional distance between the reader and the narrative filter, the writer intends to elicit an empathetic reader response. So Buckler does not likely intend the reader

to react by thinking that the character gets "only what he deserves" (Barbour 71). Note the tone when Barbour identifies his version of David's tragic flaw:

> If David is an artist-manque, it is not because he lacks innate qualities of vision, but because of some moral flaw in his character. Scene after scene of betrayal, revenge, or just plain cruelty to others, clearly reveals the nature of this flaw. He is too selfish to ever look to others. (71)

So Barbour identifies a tragic flaw of selfishness, but consider David's reactions as he is about to ask Effie to make love, in order to live up to his subtle boasting to his friends: "David felt like a friend turned enemy without the other's knowledge" (107). Then again, as she agrees to make love, notice some of these highlighted reactions in the following much-abridged passages:

> He wasn't ready for what happened then.
> "All right, Dave," she said, "with you..."
> She spoke with a kind of awful docility. As if, if it was something he had to do. As if, if anything denied him would make a quarrel between them. As if...
> "`Effie loves David.'" The silly chant other kids had mocked them with . . . . (110)
>
> He looked at her and spoke earnestly for the first time.
> "You don't have to, Effie," he said.
> . . . . She looked like a child undressing for bed. (111)

One could go on to cite numerous passages after the emotionally realistic love-making to show further signs of David's regrets, his desires to heal the betrayal, his tender but immature urges to protect her. The fault is shown to be immaturity, not selfishness, and it is not a tragic flaw but

a piece of realism. Buckler tries to reduce the emotional distancing while maintaining the cognitive ironic distance. Barbour's account of the tragic flaw and its fated consequences sounds more like a description of the moralistic catharsis of Classical Tragedy (death justly caused by a moral fault). However, this narrative strategy seems more like the average modern ironic mode tragedy where the catharsis depends on the reader's understanding of environmental determinism's role in the protagonist's failure to achieve a fully satisfying individuation. With phrases like "moral flaw" (71) and "only what he deserves" (71), Barbour seems at times to be blaming the victim rather than recognizing the intended ironic insight into the social milieu that influences David's tragic development.

The narrative voice reveals a tragic character, but one who, the reader is encouraged to believe, is capable of fathoming the great pastoral ideals of community, of family, and of peace with one's self and one's land. We are even led to believe that he could articulate these things in writing if he put his mind to it--for example, the petition for the community. But that is the crux of the tragic flaw; we know (and David also catches glimpses of it in his lucid moments in Part Six), that his tragic flaw is his ability to perceive perfection (the idyllic) juxtaposed against his inability to act decisively on it. More than that, it is his inability to risk that full performance (in his art and in his life) which

might indeed relate his imperfect fallen world to the Canaan he envisions. That is not a "moral flaw," in the sense of Barbour's analysis, so much as an ironic consequence of genius alienated by unrealistic self-expectations and by the fear of risking the fragile ego whose very fragility is compounded by the social ineptness and alienation that sometimes accompanies genius. Barbour identifies these problematic characteristics also (70), but he does not identify them as the tragic flaw.

In Part Six, "The Train," Buckler develops a maturing protagonist toward that tragic "toppling moment of clarity" (274) where David finally admits that "the trains had all gone by" (276); he generalizes about his life in the valley, how "the train of your own life went by and left you standing there in the field" (277). Before that, Buckler traces David's reflections on his increasing isolation from the community and their treatment of him as a "stranger" (232). In the following passage where David tries to evaluate his own progress in writing, Buckler even has him recognize his own self-deception:

> conviction would flood him: If he wanted to he could do as much [reveal it perfectly] for everything in the world. Yet with it there was dismay at his neglect of all the things gone by. There was the thought of all the things he would never *see*, to know exactly. There'd be such a terror of failing in even one particular, that he couldn't bear to tempt performance further. (233)

That is almost a didactic statement of his tragic fault--fear of flying--so much fear of failing the transcendent idyllic vision that he cannot "bear to tempt performance further."

Through the same filtered narrative voice that is growing in self-awareness, Buckler develops a series of images in preparation for the epiphany of the departing train. The first image follows immediately after David's recognition of the parallels between Old Herb Hennessey and himself. The panic of the revelation reminds him of a haunting incident where "once the day seemed to grow late while he was working, though his watch said only three o'clock. He saw, with a start, that it had been stopped" (233). The connotations are similar to the subsequent train images, that he perceives time and life to have betrayed him, tricked him, and left him behind as a genius exiled in the midst of his own people who fail to recognize his vision.

Then the deserted "Delacey house" (253-54) provides a series of images with similar but more complex connotations. An American lumber company has bought up these farms for their timber, leaving the home places deserted and ransacked by hunters. It is an obvious image of Eden fallen due to human materialism and lack of vision. A jar of preserves that has been missed in the abandoned house reminds the reader ironically of David "left behind" with his quaint pastoral values: "it was like a fruit missed when the others were picked: now the essence of absolute ripeness, just before it drops of itself" (254). Both Anna and David balk at opening that jar of preserves.

Again, as David and Toby hunt for partridge in this

fallen garden, David reflects on the "funny atmosphere about these abandoned fields . . . . as if you had stumbled, like children in a fairy tale, on some niche that time itself had wondrously missed" (254). But that lovely pastoral image, so typical of David, is juxtaposed against the partridges shot on the wing as they try to take off. This primes the final image of the novel, of the ascending and descending partridge, which represents David's life. David notices in the fallen partridges, "the wildness, the nervousness they had tamed with death" (256). All of the abandoned Delacey place images have ironic connotations about the pastoral ideals of David being overtaken by death.

Throughout Part Six, Buckler carefully reveals David's own growing awareness of his failure as an artist and a deliverer. Even as the reader's ironic awareness of his failure outdistances David's awareness, the emotional distance between the implied author and the protagonist is kept to a minimum so that the reader suffers with David as the tragic epiphany of the departing train breaks through to David's consciousness in the following passage:

> A baring and frightening light shone suddenly on his own life. It was like a strip of daybreak striking down a long naked corridor.
>
> This was the toppling moment of clarity which comes once to everyone, when he sees the face of his whole life in every detail. He saw then that the unquestioned premise all his calculations had been built on was false. (274)

That "unquestioned premise" is clarified in the passages following this quote; David assumes that because he is set

apart from his community in intelligence and vision, somehow fate will insure the college education, the recognition, the leadership role in his community, and the artistic ability to articulate the *Canaan* vision. The irony of this premise is echoed by the imagery of the jigsaw puzzles worked on by Toby, and Anna, and David during their final visit: "one of them would pick up a piece of the jigsaw now and then, in passing, and try to fit it in somewhere; but the piece was never the right one" (273). David's premise is that the jigsaw of his ambitions and disparate visions will automatically come together in time, because of his genius, or because of his personal dispensation of grace.

The tragedy of Canaan is that he has never found time to climb the mountain all the way, to transcend the valley and the narrowness of his idyllic vision, to gain the larger view, to make the artistic and visionary "connections," as Barbour points out (66). Paying dues is not a part of his idyllic vision of himself as the inspired artist or the anointed leader. He has never found the time to leave the valley to gain the broad perspective on how wider political, economic, and social issues might impinge upon his pastoral vision of Canaan. His naivety about war, reflected in the sentimental narrative voice he creates in his writing (262-63), is a good example of the narrow vulnerability of his vision.

Thus Buckler prepares the reader for the Epilogue, having already established the tragic epiphany, the recognition of

failure, having fully developed the tragic flaw. But in struggling to minimize the emotional distance between the reader and David through that naked uncensored stream of consciousness, Buckler seems to have led some early critics, like Young and Bissel, into missing some of the ironic tragedy. Nothing in the epilogue can change the protagonist into Young's "pastoral . . . hero" (Pastoral 225), nor can it change the Valley of David's youth into Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," although there are some thematic parallels as Bissel suggests (Buckler *Mountain* xii). However, "Fern Hill" is clearly structured as a chronological pastoral according to Young's classifications of pastoral impulse, with archetypal geographical idealization and a pastoral vision of youth which is not to be found in Buckler's Valley. The theme of the novel is more than merely how time maliciously robs the idyllic youth of energy and life, or how youth refuses to recognize time's chains; what is more significant here is "how a man could be trapped by his own nature" (Buckler, *Mountain* 261).

On the other hand, Buckler does not bring the protagonist to the foot of his final mountain climb as a totally selfish young man stuck in adolescent self-delusions, as Barbour tends to suggest. By then, David knows that he has become a victim to his pastoral vision of duty to family, to the land, to the valley community, and to his fastidious ordering of the exterior landscape without the requisite ordering of his own

mind. He has matured in his recognition of these things, so to soothe his haunting knowledge of the failure to escape "his own nature" and of the "crossroad junctions . . . left irretrievably far behind" (274), he heads for the mountain that has always promised him the peace, the broader vision, and the healing suggested by the very first paragraph of the novel. So with Buckler emphasizing his maturing self-knowledge and his desperate quest for healing, the reader cannot help but empathize with the frustrated potential and sensitivity.

Thus, analysis of the dialogic voice, especially of Buckler's distancing strategies in David's meditation, corroborates Barbour's claim that the reader should recognize ironic distance between the author and the protagonist; however, the analysis also reveals Buckler's attempt at reducing emotional distance between the protagonist and the reader. The tragic flaw is revealed clearly when this strategy is fully recognized. The dialectic between David's heritage of rural Maritime idyllic impulses and the darker realities that stifle his creativity produces a sense of place rarely paralleled in the Canadian Modern novel.

THE VOICE FROM PISGAH'S LOFTY HEIGHTS

Further to the importance of narrative voice analysis in this novel, one notes that during the final mountain climb, two shifts in point of view away from the David filter are

helpful in indicating the two strategies of distancing. The first shift exemplifies the author's reduction in the emotional distancing to evoke empathy with David, while the second shift reveals the author's overt cognitive distancing between the author's insight and David's delusions. This all helps to create the dialectic between David's idyllic notions about the potential for utopian community under his artistic guidance and the author's tragic message about the protagonist's delusions despite his good intentions.

In the first narrative shift, Buckler emphasizes one last time some of the significant differences between David and the average working man in the valley by shifting the narrative filter to Steve as David encounters him in passing, near the foot of the mountain. This reinforces the intended empathy for David. Buckler alternates between filtering the voice through "Steve's half-thoughts" (282) and using the omniscient narrative agent to focus on Steve's manner of consciousness. Here is an example of the latter:

> He had lived as many years as David, but time itself was a thing he would never hear or see. There was inside and outside for him too, but he would never look at the eye of his own watching. He saw the trees and fields. Yet in a way he didn't see them at all. A tree was a tree, a thing for the axe. A field was a field. You hauled across it when things were frozen, ploughed it when things were soft. That's all there was to it. (283)

This is implicitly contrasted to David's more sophisticated cognitive processes; Buckler wants to make it clear that the average man and this gifted protagonist do not see the same

tree.

Buckler even uses his narrative agent to detail the mechanics of Steve's cognitive ramblings, emphasizing the primacy of sensory data and the primitive processing of these. This is contrasted to David's remarkable insight into Steve's consciousness and into the exact type of verbal intercourse necessary to lubricate the social situation and to establish the right interpersonal distance. In fact, the narrative agent suggests that David's sensitivity to Steve's consciousness leaves Steve with a greater ability to define his own thoughts (284), thus hinting at David's ability to articulate meaning for his people. This must be important to Buckler for him to spend such effort on a minor character at such a climactic moment; it reveals Buckler's continuing commitment to creating empathy and to narrowing the emotional distance between the reader and the protagonist.

The second revealing narrative shift happens right after one of David's transcendental epiphanies, which is filtered through his articulate if sometimes ambiguous consciousness. He has just turned at the top of the mountain for a panoramic glimpse of *his* valley, his metaphorical Canaan. The physical experience, as usual in David's world, triggers a spiritual "translation" where he perceives the panoramic totality of his calling as writer, oracle, and guide for the people of the valley. In the following passage, his cognitive process becomes decidedly transcendent as he thinks he has the key to

this messianic calling to be a writer, a kind of poet-guide:

> He saw at last how you could *become* the thing you told.
>
> It wouldn't be necessary to take them one by one [images and truths]. . . . All he'd have to do ... oh, it was so gloriously simple ... was to find their single core of meaning. . . . A single beam of light is enough to light all the shadows, by turning it from one to another.
>
> He didn't consider *how* he would find it. . . . Nor how long it might take. . . . He knew only that he would do it ... it would make him the greatest writer in the whole world. (298-99)

Buckler's temporary narrative shift at the paragraph break from the filtered voice to an authorial-like unfiltered narrative judgement is important to understanding the ironic distance between the author and the filtered voice of this final epiphany. At that point the irony and cognitive distancing is overt, but it is also clearly implied by the tone of this entire passage. The image of becoming "the thing you told" invokes a kind of "word became flesh" messianic connotation with definite ironic implications. Alan Young closes his article and argument for David as a pastoral hero by quoting that first sentence of the quote above, but he does not include the ironic lines that follow it. A sensitive reading should not ignore the irony (in tone and fact) of "All he had to do ... oh, it was so gloriously simple ... was to find their single core of meaning" (298). This refers to the metaphysical truth of all those images in the creative writer's notebook, or worse, all those in his mind. The notebook and the "inspiration" do not make a creative writer without the actual performance or art production, and that is

never "gloriously simple." The reader must be inclined to doubt his "arrival" at ultimate artistic truth.

With this irony reinforced by the authorial-like comment that doubts David's reasoning, one has to wonder how Young can conclude with the following:

> when David finally does climb the Mountain, it is not in negation of his experience in the Valley but to unify that experience within the single, all-embracing and god-like vision of the artist he has finally become. (225)

That conclusion is only possible if one ignores the ironic tone of the lines following the messianic ones and the dominant tone of the entire passage. As to "the artist he has finally become," it must be an axiom of creative writing that if there is no tangible art product then there is no artist. This is central to understanding the tragic flaw of the protagonist and the theme of the novel. One does not become an artist by just receiving inspiration, nor does one really hold a novel in one's head or even in a note book.

Still, it is not enough to say that the theme is simply about the gap between ideal vision and public performance. The final narrative voices emphasize the bittersweet tone of the tragedy. As David dies on the mountain the narrative voice shifts first to Ellen, who has just completed the rug, which is rough but real art. She has finished it with appropriately brilliant colours for the history of David--scarlet, then white. The rug is tangible art and it speaks to the simple historical (as opposed to the idyllic) unity of

David's family. It speaks to the brilliant flash of David's genius in the greater story of the valley, but the rug also speaks of the gap between artistic genius and art.

The last shift in point of view, however, focuses back to the mountain in the voice of the narrative agent. Much like the concluding voice in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, this narrative agent does not arrive with last minute transcendent images to mute the death, nor with some neat ideological closure. An objective and detached voice settles for mimetic accuracy in describing the increasing snow fall. There are no intense attempts at the perfect transcendental metaphor, as is the case when the voice is funnelled through David. The white of the snow merely compliments the final death colour in Ellen's rug. The seasonal imagery is no mystery by this time. A train whistle is recorded, reminding the reader, without comment, of David's tragic recognition of failure.

Buckler's narrative voice here is remarkably restrained as the camera-eye focuses more closely on David's face and body as they interact with the snow. It reveals how the snow flakes melt at first on contact with his skin, but as time passes the flakes do not melt as fast, and the reader infers the natural cooling of death through the following lines:

> And then they did not melt on his eyelids or on his cheeks or in the corners of his mouth or anywhere on his face at all. And then they grew smoothly and exactly over him and over the fallen log that lay beside him until the two outlines were as one. (301)

This is not like the passionate description sometimes

associated with Buckler. He repeats the neutral conjunction "and then" several times to emphasize the unadorned objectivity of the camera and the voice. The parallel covering of the log and the body until they are indistinguishable reminds the reader of one of David's more lucid reflections, "how you could love the land's face and the day's face, but how they never loved you back" (261). However, there is no suggestion of a sentient land or landscape "rejecting" him, nor a suggestion that he is its victim. He is, as the fallen log is.

In closing the novel, the implied author shakes off the neutral documentation of that cold camera (it having served its rhetorical purpose) by choosing deliberately one final living image. The narrative voice describes the partridge rising from the snow, evoking the memory of the partridges shot on the wing by Toby and David. Those partridges were cut off by death before reaching their zenith, rising out of a corrupted pastoral scene and falling into the realism of the hunter's capricious hand. The final ascent of the partridge symbolizes David's surprising, colourful, but fleeting life, as he reaches toward the zenith of his mountain. Thus, the following description of the partridge's descent parallels David's tragic descent:

> And then its grey body fell swiftly in one straight movement, as if burdened with the weight of its own flight: down between the trees, down, swoopingly, directly, intensely, exactly down over the side of the far mountain. (302)

The adverb, "intensely," describes his life and death, while the adverb, "exactly," has been one of David's favourites as he contemplates perfection in concepts, in prose, and in life. Of course, he misses each of those perfections by a wide mark. That final image reinforces the slant of the implied author, signifying again the intent to minimize the emotional distance between the implied author and the protagonist, and thus between the reader and the protagonist, in spite of our ironic knowledge of his delusions.

Both the partridge imagery and the rug's brilliant colour imagery reinforce the narrative voice's intonations throughout the novel that suggest reasons for empathy and a recognition of the tragic proportions of his life and death. There is little doubt that David is as flawed and as selfish as the rest of the fallen, but there is also evidence of his altruistic intentions about reaching toward a pastoral ideal. Even in his final mountain climb he thinks "of the fields. . . . of the people in the valley. . . . his own face moved kindredly among them" (286). When he fantasizes writing about his people he thinks "but people will see that there is more to them than the side that shows. . . . They're intricate as anyone else, but there's no hardness about it" (300). He even feels a god-like (or messianic) power to grant them grace in the following: "I have given an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves or each other" (300). This perhaps is one of the better examples of irony with empathy urged

simultaneously, due to David's obvious altruistic impulses.

The narrative voice of David's mountain heights epiphany chronicles his last attempt at turning failure into visionary optimism for the future. In the valley as the train leaves him standing in the field, he begins to be aware that the fruits of his own tree of knowledge are as guilty of corrupting the pastoral innocence as any other corruption in the valley. In climbing the mountain he is reaching far too late for that Tree of Life, that creative force of the artist that has slipped beyond his grasp due to his fascination with the perfection of the idyllic vision, and due to his fear of risking the actual performance of his version of that vision.

Thus one notes that through the narrative voices Buckler juxtaposes the idyllic impulses revered by David against the realities of time, of corruption, of fear, of procrastination, and of all those realities that can rob the artist of fulfilment and identity. Young and Bissell are not wrong in recognizing and responding to the pastoral impulses recorded in the narrative voices. They are not wrong in noticing that Buckler draws on a heritage of pastoral literature, but they are wrong in reading this as though it were written in a pastoral mode. Rather, it is that mode of dialectical realism again, indisputably a tragic mode this time, but so different in tone from Ross's *As For Me and My House* where the narrator despises the slightest suggestion of the idyllic in her husband's art (Ross 69), and quite different from

Vanderhaeghe's ironic mode or Richards's ironic mode, which eschew any hint of the idyllic tradition. This novel, along with *Who Has Seen the Wind*, shares a good deal of the credit for pioneering the tradition of later writers, like Alistair MacLeod, who exploit the potential of using the idyllic traditions of their regions in a dialectic with the darker social and economic realities of their era.

IDYLL VERSUS REALISM IN BUCKLER'S SHORT STORIES

Of his short stories from the collection, *The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories* (1975), the four published in *Macleans* from 1948 to 1951 are probably the strongest and the three published in *Chatelaine* are among the least able to distinguish between sentiment and sentimentality when it comes to dealing with the idyllic. The rest fall somewhere in between, except for "First Born Son," one of his early but strong publications (in *Esquire*, 1941). In it, Buckler establishes a conflict between the simple idyllic values and hopes of the father and the disillusioning realism of a son who despises the backbreaking, mind-numbing land that is his birthright. The narrative filter simply switches between the two as they plough a field; the father reminisces about the birth of this son on a Christmas morning, and the assurance he had of immortality through this male heir to the farm, while at the same time the boy's thoughts churn in frustration at his bonds. The story ends with the clash of values and

visions unresolved. This is the centre of Buckler's strength in fiction: the juxtaposition of idyllic values against the sometimes bitter realities of rural family life.

In many of his weaker stories, he consciously or unconsciously opts for a softening of that stark dialectic with a sentimental or over-written ending. When these stories were collected in 1975, Buckler wrote to Claude Bissel admitting that he was embarrassed by some of this short fiction written twenty to thirty-five years earlier:

> I do have a few excuses for even the molasses of sentimentality. At the time most of the stories were written, I had no idea that I was a `writer,' or that they would even be preserved. And, at that time, it was impossible to market a story that didn't have an overall . . . `upbeat.' . . . I suppose it was whoring on my part, to keep the market in mind, but when one is starving, one does strange things. (Bissel 57)

However in "Penny in the Dust," "The Rebellion of Young David," "First Born Son," "The Quarrel," and "The Clumsy One," he manages to rise above formulaic endings and sentimentality, (although the ending of "The Quarrel" is drawn out with more explanation than is necessary).

Of them all, "Penny in the Dust" has been anthologized and praised more than any other. It is the shortest, but perhaps the most complex in narrative strategy and design. Yet it has a broad appeal to sophisticated and unsophisticated readers alike. It is written in a kind of elegiac mode, though if one recognizes the oral intonations of the narrative voice, one might think of it as a transcribed oral eulogy. As

editor W.O. Mitchell wrote to Buckler in the acceptance letter, "The characterization of the child and the father are sure: the story is moving without being mawkish or sentimental" (Bissel 59). That is no small accomplishment considering the potential for sentimentality in a eulogy about an emotional moment between a young son and the deceased father.

Buckler begins the narrative *in medias res*, where a mature first person narrator and his sister have returned to a rural setting for the funeral of their father. The narrator is telling the story, or perhaps writing it down, soon after the opening scene near the day of his father's burial; however, the majority of the narrative consists of the narrator's flashback to a summer incident when the narrator is seven years old. The tone and the pronouns suggest the presence of a narratee, a privileged audience to an oral confessional anecdote. This audience is never revealed, but is addressed in second person several times, and in a confidential, conversational tone throughout. The narratee is privileged with information and insights from the narrator which were not even shared with his sister. The motivation behind the narrator's sharing seems to be the universal need for communal grieving and eulogizing.

Buckler's narrator in the flashback shifts from his mature analyzing voice into the sensory and cognitive centres of the young Pete and back again with an ease of the

unselfconscious oral anecdote. His initial description of the relationship between father and son is brilliant in narrative strategy as it responds defensively to an opening conversation between the adult narrator and his sister. She recalls the central incident of the lost penny and passes it off patronizingly without much understanding of the dynamics of the relationship involved. The following includes the first narrative shift at the beginning of the flashback:

> She laughed indulgently. "You were a crazy kid, weren't you."
>
> I was. But there was more to it than that. . .
>
> You would have to understand about my father, and that is the hard thing to tell. . . . If I say that he never held me on his knee when I was a child and that I never heard him laugh out loud in his life, it would make him sound humourless and severe. If I said that whenever I'd be reeling off some fanciful plans and he'd come into the kitchen and I'd stop short, you'd think that he was distant and that in some kind of way I was afraid of him. None of that would be true.
>
> There's no way to tell it to make it sound like anything more than an inarticulate man a little at sea with an imaginative child. You'll have to take my word for it that there was more to it than that. (3-4)

In that relatively short passage a great portion of the characterization of the father and narrator is established. The denials of our possible conclusions about the father signal the narrator's love for the father, even while we believe the "if" clauses implicitly, despite his protests. We believe both that he *was* "an inarticulate man a little at sea," and also that "there was more to it."

So by that unusual tone whereby the narrator protests the impossibility of his assigned job as narrator, Buckler

establishes, not an unreliable narrator, but an emotionally subjective voice (entirely appropriate for the elegy). He has cut the ironic distance--the distance of knowledge, emotion, and philosophy--between the implied author and the narrator, to a minimum. Thus, the intimate, oral, confessional tone, decreases the emotional distance between the narrative focalizer and the reader. This last lack of distance is a common end for Buckler's narrative strategies in his short stories. It sets him apart from many writers of the modern ironic mode who usually distance the implied author from an unreliable narrator in first person narration or from a fallible filter in third person. For example, we certainly do not see this kind of "reliable" narrator in Vanderhaeghe's fiction. The point is similar to Wayne Booth's when he writes about "Control of Sympathy," in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, that the creation of an effective reliable narrative voice is just as complex as the creation of an effective unreliable narrative voice (274-84).

The narrator also characterizes the father and himself through some simple metaphors and similes; in the first passage the cognitive centre and the diction still belong entirely to the mature narrator, while the second occurs after the shift to the younger narrator's perspective. The mature narrator describes it this way:

> It was as if his sure-footed way in the field forsook him the moment he came near the door of my child's world and that he could never intrude on it without feeling awkward and conscious of trespass;

> and that I, sensing that but not understanding it, felt at the sound of his solid step outside, the child-world's foolish fragility. (4)

The diction and the concepts would never pass as the child's cognitive process, but compare it to the equally expressive mature diction that, in this case, articulates a conceptually child-like image from the younger narrator's perspective: "But when I looked up at Father, standing there like the shape of everything sound and straight, it was like daylight shredding the memory of a silly dream" (5). He is careful to retain the child's cognitive centre so as not to shift out of the immediacy of the child's experience. Both narrative passages continue to develop the characterization and relationship toward the climactic encounter when the father finds the lost penny in the dust and keeps it after hearing his son's moving explanation of his buried treasure fantasy.

Throughout the climax of the story, Buckler uses italics for certain syllables of words to show oral emphasis. He does this mainly in the dialogue, but in the following passage he does it also in the narrative voice to emphasize the oral and dialogic quality of the narrative, right through to the dramatic narrative time shift in this final line:

> "*Laughin'* and *talkin'*," I said. Louder, smiling intensely, com*pell*ing him, by the absolute conviction of some true particular, to believe me.
>
> He looked up then. It was the only time I had ever seen tears in his eyes. It was the only time in my seven years that he had ever put his arm around me.
>
> I wondered, though, why he hesitated, and then put the penny back in his own pocket.
>
> Yesterday I knew. (7)

Besides emphasizing the dialogic qualities of the narrative by that italicized syllable in "compelling," Buckler also manages to avoid the danger of sentimentality by focusing on physical particulars of the interaction immediately before and after the tears and the touch.

When he says "Yesterday I knew," there is a sudden narrative shift back to the actual time of the narrative delivery, which refocuses the story on the burial and eulogy in order to complete the final connotations of the central image of the "penny in the dust." The reason for the father keeping the penny is revealed in the final lines as the son takes out his father's burial suit:

> I found the penny again yesterday, when we were getting out his good suit--in an upper vest pocket where no one ever carries change. It was still shining. He must have kept it polished.
> I left it there. (7)

Those final lines do a lot with a simple image. The penny, which was the boy's "buried treasure," becomes a symbol for the father of the treasured relationship that exists between them, despite their lack of verbal and physical communication skills. When the narrator commits the penny to the dust along with his father's body, in that final four word paragraph, the "penny in the dust" becomes in turn the narrator's symbol of the "buried treasure" of their unique relationship--committed to the dust, but nevertheless his personal treasure.

The narrative strategies and tone in this story are effective, then, for a number of reasons. The tone of

intimate oral disclosure from the grieving narrator to the narratee is managed partially because the reader witnesses the sister's exclusion from the narrator's confidence about the penny's significance to him, and also partially by the believable defensive tone in which the narrator characterizes the father. The completely successful creation of a reliable narrator depends here on the credible subjectivity rather than the distanced objectivity of the narrator. The narrative shifts have an oral anecdotal quality, while the narrative voice establishes the imagery effortlessly from within the narrative, camouflaging the hand of the implied author. Altogether, that creates a convincing dialogic voice.

A SUMMARY OF BUCKLER'S SENSE OF PLACE

Some of the thematic directions of "Penny in the Dust" are typical of Buckler's fiction. For example, he often suggests that the apparent lack of communications in rural Maritime families should not always be construed as a shallowness in relationships; this is part of a larger defense against hasty "outsider" judgements of the rural community based on peripheral perceptions. David no doubt speaks for Buckler when he says "there is more to them than the side that shows" (*Mountain* 300). The community and family responses to death and labour are also themes common to his other fiction.

These themes reflect some of Buckler's distinctive sense of place. The struggles between staying and leaving, between

traditional rural life styles and the diversity of urban values, which are documented in *The Mountain and the Valley*, continue to characterize the fiction of this region today. A good number of these themes contend that not all the region's idyllic impulses are ideals to be lightly discarded, and that indeed some of the idyllic aspects of community and landscape persist not only in the mind but in reality. This fact helps the dialectical mode of realism to make its contributions to a distinctive sense of place. At his best, when he juxtaposes the pastoral ideals against the social and psychological realities of the rural Maritimes, Buckler carves away the romantic elements of the traditional family and rural community ideals by honest exploration of distinctive conflicts like those involved in "going down the road." He contrasts the real psychological violence, misunderstandings, and divisions in Maritime families against the more idyllic versions of family roles and models, as Alistair MacLeod, Donna Smyth, and others continue to do. At the same time, the synthesis of the dialectic searches out those aspects of the ideals that might well be worth saving or at least worth mourning if they are about to be lost, in order to separate them from the idyllic notions and traditions that prove to be dross or vanity. MacLeod's fiction continues to raise this aspect of the dialectic to a regionally distinctive high art.

This mode develops from a literary tradition that pays close attention to the pastoral notions of the regional

society, from Howe, Haliburton, and McCulloch, through to Day, Macphail, Raddall, and Bruce. Buckler's variation of this dialectical mode in *The Mountain and the Valley* adds something to Mitchell's accomplishments by establishing that the juxtaposition of idyllic impulses with mimetic realism is just as effective a strategy in a purely tragic mode as it is in comedy or in tragicomedy. Thus Buckler has had, and is having, a marked effect on the regional tradition of fiction, and (by extension) on the Canadian tradition. Buckler's fiction in *The Mountain and the Valley* (and in a few of his better stories) acts as a harbinger of an increasingly sophisticated tradition that features pastoral impulses being used effectively to enhance Atlantic realism in fiction.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

Chapter 4: ALISTAIR MACLEOD: ATLANTIS VOICE

THE SINKING OF CAPE BRETON

MacLeod's fiction often documents the decline of local ideals and community traditions in Cape Breton much as Buckler does with his fallen Arcadia North. Rumours of the Atlantis-like submersion of Cape Breton are not new, not if one refers to the socioeconomic and cultural "sinking" of the island. The resource extraction industries like mining, logging, and fishing are collapsing in terms of how many families can be supported from the wage-labour required, while the transplanted Celtic culture (including the Gaelic language) of many small communities seems threatened, not only by the economic decline, but also by the dominant American and English Canadian cultures in the media and in the educational system. Alistair MacLeod has chosen as his creative mission not just to chronicle that decline, but also to relate the human dimensions of it to the universal conditions of smaller dependent cultures struggling for some sort of compromised survival. It is not difficult to imagine how such a creative venture could possibly fit into the pattern of juxtaposing idyllic impulses against starker mimetic realism, especially since he records the aging of idealized and time-honoured community lifestyles and values as part of his social realism.

As a region within a region, Cape Breton has many

characteristics that are microcosmic of the Atlantic region, like the threats to the economy and the regional cultures from the dominant societies around them. Beyond the Atlantic region, MacLeod's fiction manages to make Cape Breton archetypal in certain aspects of isolation and in the struggle to preserve certain values, ideals, and mores--which Buckler called "the valid stamp of the indigenous" (*Mountain* 229)--in the face of socioeconomic deprivation and cultural submersion.

Probably Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County is the most commonly used example of a fictional microcosm representing a region (the American Deep South), while also representing the universal conditions of the outsider regions--regions often in decline because of their isolation from the centres of cultural and economic power. Yet in some ways, MacLeod's fictional world, even more than Faulkner's, is the archetype of the isolated region in danger of losing its distinctive culture. His Cape Breton is not only a radically dependent, undiversified, agrarian and resource-extraction economy, but more than that, it has the remnants of a distinct language-based culture (Celtic) transplanted and preserved in this New World "Atlantis," where it is now in danger of being submerged by a larger world order.

So MacLeod's themes emerge from his documentation of his people's struggles to preserve the best of the disappearing culture, and of their compromises for survival against the socioeconomic deprivation of this fictional and real island.

He often focuses on the trauma of young people "going down the road" (moving from the island), due to educational or economic need. He often uses the loss of the Gaelic to represent the larger communication and cultural gaps between the island society and the outside world, and also between the generations in the Cape Breton families, as in "The Closing Down of Summer" and "The Tuning of Perfection." Throughout almost every story, MacLeod employs a conscious dialectic between the idyllic notions of the tradition and the social and economic realism of contemporary Cape Breton. This dialectic, as in *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Mountain and the Valley*, is not aimed at a general defense of the idyllic or traditional values as much as at a starker understanding of the alienation and the sense of loss, which are part of the island's social realities. Probably no other Canadian writer does this as consistently and as effectively as MacLeod.

Almost all of the critics who go beyond a thematic critique of his fiction mention his distinctive style, or tone, or narrative voice. His narrative strategies and styles create carefully crafted, memorable, and varied narrative voices. Some are darkly elegiac like the first person narrator of "The Closing Down of Summer," while some are ironically distanced and fallible or unreliable like the first person voice in "The Vastness of the Dark." There are haunting introspective voices, usually first person reliable narrators, carrying dark secrets of their own death or guilt

within them, as in "The Road to Rankin's Point" or "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood." There are educated, reflective voices, aware of the outside world which gives them complex and troubled perspectives on their Cape Breton roots ("The Boat" and "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun"). There are tale-like, ruminative, raconteur-like, and self-conscious voices each with a distinctive perspective on what sense of place is all about. Each of the narrative voices is carefully dialogized (including both ironic and reliable narrators) by MacLeod's convincing creation of authentic, unassuming voices arising from the landscape of the story. All of these voices, either directly or ironically, raise serious questions about the viability of idyllic notions and traditions indigenous to Cape Breton's rural communities, and about the socioeconomic realities dictating changes in their culture and lifestyle.

THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO MACLEOD'S VOICES

The first public response to MacLeod's fiction did not come in the usual form of critical reviews so much as from awards and prestigious publications in America. *The Massachussetts Review* published "The Boat" in 1968, as the product of an unpublished, unknown Canadian from Cape Breton, and the following year the story was chosen as one of the twenty best stories published in America for the year, in *Best American Short Stories* (1969), in the company of fiction from Malamud, Singer, and Plath (Nicholson 90). Following the

publication of stories in *Fiddlehead, The Atlantic Advocate,* and *Tamarack Review,* his story "Lost Salt Gift of Blood" was published in *The Southern Review* and was chosen subsequently for *Best American Short Stories* (1975). He was the first Canadian to be honoured twice in this manner. Other short fiction by MacLeod has been chosen "for the roll of honour, or listed as distinctive in *The Yearbook of the American Short Story*" (Nicholson 90).

When *Lost Salt Gift of Blood,* MacLeod's first collection of stories, was published, the critical reaction was overwhelmingly positive from both the reviewers and his fellow writers. Writers like Marian Engel, Joyce Carol Oates, and Robert Weaver praised his talent effusively, while Hugh MacLennan went so far as to say that "this may well be the best pure writing to ever appear in Canadian fiction (Nicholson 90). The only two mixed reviews, by Jon Kertzer and Laurence Ricou, are worth noting because they do point to the areas of critical debate about the narrative voice that were to arise occasionally a decade later.

In a review in *Canadian Forum* titled "Equivocal Victories," Jon Kertzer says,

> The great merit of these stories is their power and authenticity of detail. . . . [H]e writes with precision and authority. He provides a background rich and palpable enough to bring life to the characters and to give urgency to their problems. (51)

That reflects the general tone of the majority of reviews, but Kertzer goes on to say the following:

> The weakness of the book is a tendency to excess. One [story] . . . allows its tone to become remorselessly elegiac. But at best MacLeod weds his characters to their locale so that each is enriched by the other . . . . (51)

This implies that parts of the narrative voice in at least one story are overwritten, a charge that Laurie Ricou seems to agree with. He chooses to illustrate his reservations with a passage from "The Boat," probably MacLeod's most critically acclaimed story:

> the stories . . . are often emotionally subtle, but the self-conscious remembering can turn revelation into contrivance. The quoted passage, for example quivers on the edge of excess, and drifts into increasingly vague sentiment. The self-assertive narrator . . . is always adjusting to try to put things straight: "I say this again as if it all happened at once and as if all of my sisters were of identical ages and like so many lemmings going into another sea and, again, it was of course not that way at all." But his hesitations do more to deflect interest . . . . (Ricou, Story 118)

Here Ricou provides the only early criticism with a specific example of the objections to the narration, but his objection is aimed at a purposefully and carefully established narrative strategy, in "The Boat," designed to create a narrator with a self-effacing modesty about his ability to get the story right. This study defends such narrative voices and narrative strategies in subsequent analysis.

The first major article on MacLeod's work did not appear until 1985, but after the publication of his second collection, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, the critical response proliferated, and was almost without exception very positive. Colin Nicholson's "Signatures of Time" (1985) is

still one of the most thorough going explorations of both MacLeod's themes and narrative style, although the only other story that he critiques, apart from the first collection, is "The Closing Down of Summer." He makes some important points about MacLeod's use of narrative voices. For example, in commenting on MacLeod's "relative paucity of dialogue" (92), he argues that "it is the sculpting of the emotional infrastructure of any given situation" (92) by the narrative voice, which gives his prose "immediacy and intensity" (92). Again about the narrative voice, Nicholson uses the same example as Ricou (quoted above), as well as other similar examples, in coming to the following conclusion:

> The narrative consciousness in these stories repeatedly demonstrates its ability to enter their [the stories'] constructed worlds at will, at any point, and from that chosen present, range backwards or forwards in time. In the process, "The Boat" reflects post-modernistically upon its own procedures. (93)

This is quite different from Ricou's conclusion; the "postmodern" or reflexive structure of some of the narrative strategies is examined in the subsequent discussion of "The Boat" and of "Vision."

One other important general observation Nicholson makes about MacLeod's narrative voices, comes in the context of contrasting the style of "The Boat" with Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." He suggests that MacLeod's narrative strategies of using a present tense "now" for contemplative, self-conscious narration is diametrically opposed to

Hemingway's "now" with its "celebration of sensuous immediacy" and its "fear of contemplation" (96). He suggests that,

> in contrast with Hemingway's preferred American usage, the "now" in which MacLeod's first-person narrators tell their stories is one of ruminative awareness, one that is densely historical, resonant with the history of a local community. (97)

Contrasts with Hemingway's style or narrative voice are quite revealing and are examined again in the discussion of "The Boat" and of "Vision."

A number of increasingly positive reviews and articles followed MacLeod's publication of *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories.* One common subject addressed by most of the reviewers had to do with emotional intensity and emotional credibility. Fraser Sutherland summed it up with that old dichotomy that the "stories contain much sentiment but little sentimentality" (36). Most critics agreed, but not all. Thomas Sullivan summarizes the source of the debate:

> He's no homey old story-teller spinning yarns about the quaint folks down on the jetty. He's a tough precise stylist capable of superb, dazzling prose. He may find his truths in the material at hand, but he polishes them until they're fit for export to anywhere people read. (25)

Even more directly to the point of debate, he points to the subject matter: "No writer who deals seriously with boys and dogs and Santa Claus, with singing of Gaelic songs, is playing it safe, exactly, but neither is he straining" (25). Jack Hodgins comments on this issue of realism's dialectic with potentially sentimental subject matter, with the following praise: "While very much aware of the hardness of life for the

people . . . , he perceives their secret longings, admires their patient strengths, and records with great authority the small triumphs in their struggle for dignity" (13).

Two American-born critics differ in their assessment of this issue, at least in relation to some particular stories. Russell Brown, in *The American Book Review*, says,

> MacLeod is one of the best literary craftsmen in Canada, capable of conveying intense literary emotions in a prose that never strains for effect. . . . Each is an elegy . . . yet none is sentimental or manipulative. (21)

Louise Erdrich, in *The New York Times Book Review*, reviewed an American released collection titled *Lost Salt Gift of Blood: New & Selected Stories (1988)*, including ten stories from the two McClelland and Stewart collections and a new lengthy short story called "Island" (later released in Canada by Thistledown as a novella). She is the dissenting voice, with a mixed review, though positive on balance. Note the following generalization: "Occasionally they sentimentalize, more often celebrate with a tough eye, the lives of men and women close to the sea" (15). She singles out "Winter Dog" as a story that "lapses when the writer works with cliched situations" (15), while "In the Fall," she feels, "manages to rise above the inherent sentimentality" (15) of a cliched situation. She reserves detailed and warm praise for the style, structure, and thematic development of "Vision," probably MacLeod's most structurally complex fiction to date. But her charges of "lapses" in "cliched situations" raise a central critical

challenge to dialectical realism, the danger of sentimentality in dealing with idyllic impulses. The critical consensus as to MacLeod's general success in this challenge has grown stronger in recent years, and this bodes well for continuing possibilities for dialectical realism.

In 1988, Arnold Davidson published a critique of some of MacLeod's fiction, again singling out "Vision," as well as the title stories of the two collections, for praise and for detailed thematic analysis (32-42). In the same year, John Ditsky, a respected Steinbeck and Faulkner scholar, published a major article in an American journal praising the relatively unique style and tone of MacLeod's prose. He critiques most of the stories, including "Island," and concludes by saying that Canadian reviewers have called MacLeod "one of the finest Canadian practitioners of the short story form presently writing" (9), but that MacLeod's growing international audience "may well question the need to include the proper adjective,"--*Canadian* (9). These articles along with several published interviews signal a blossoming of critical interest in MacLeod compared to a decade ago when he seemed to be one of Canada's best kept secrets. He has now been translated into several languages, including Russian and French, and the new attention on both sides of the border brings with it a strong consensus about MacLeod's place in Canadian Literature, despite his relative paucity of publishing.

In 1987, before the release of *Island*, Janice Kulyk

Keefer gave MacLeod's fiction significant status in her survey of Maritime fiction, *Under Eastern Eyes*. This is some of the most sustained and penetrating thematic criticism of his work to date, and it corroborates the conclusions of the previous major studies by Nicholson, Davidson, and Ditsky. She also occasionally makes observations on narrative strategy or on style that open doors to appreciating the sometimes complex thematic development. In her introduction to MacLeod she touches on some major elements of my thesis in this study, at least in relation to Buckler and MacLeod. In the following passage, she implies the presence of a dialectic between the ideals (the idyllic) and a darker realism, by which these authors synthesize a "poignant" sense of place:

> Like the *Mountain and the Valley, Lost Salt Gift of Blood* derives its poignancy from a sense of unequal conflict between old and new, past and present; between that which is desired and that which cannot be avoided. Unlike Buckler, however, MacLeod is not preoccupied with the nature of time and memory, the suasions of solipsism, or the phenomenology of perception. He is closer to Nowlan in his engagement with the inevitable, intolerable real: the poverty which defines his people. (182)

Here one senses the implication that there is no question that MacLeod's chronicling of idyllic impulses serves to accentuate the social realism rather than softening it; the juxtaposition is clearly a strategy aimed at a more complete and profound realism, socially and psychologically.

Some of her comments about the reader's relationship to the narrator also anticipate, to some degree, another of this study's points about his frequent narrative strategy of

closing the emotional distance between the implied author and the narrative voice even when the voice is distanced by the greater knowledge of the author or reader. She says, "To read MacLeod, one must take on the narrator's own charged feelings and claim his people for one's own; one must jump into the sea and cling to the raft of his prose" (183). In an earlier review, she also implies the interesting possibility of identifying a narratee (listener) in his narrative strategy, aside from the reading audience, when she says, "MacLeod establishes a storyteller's compact between narrator and reader--one wants to say `listener', given the compelling cadence of his prose" (Keefer, As 114).

As to the universality and influence of MacLeod's fiction, Keefer also compares (with flattering conclusions) his thematic scope with that of Buckler, Nowlan, and Richards. This study returns to that debate subsequently. Again, a recent article by Francis Berces titled "The Existential Maritimer" on *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*, also suggests a scope far beyond a narrow regional interest. She says,

> MacLeod's fictive world generates implications which I believe are singularly relevant to the development of Canada historically. . . . [His] regional materials take on philosophic importance, and this elevates an interest in place to a universal concern with one's place in the world. (115)

Though the development of her thesis and her definition of existentialism are a bit vague at times, this particular judgement is certainly one defended by this study.

PARADIGMATIC BOAT--PARADIGMATIC ISLAND

As many of the critics indicate, the narrative voices of MacLeod's fiction, rather than the dialogue, become his major means of "sculpting . . . the emotional infrastructure" (Nicholson 92) and of marshalling his various strategies for thematic development. All of his narrative voices are carefully dialogized, most of them as first person central characters, so that he avoids (like most contemporary fiction writers) any narrative voice that is not filtered through a character. Many of his narrators, especially in his later work, are reliable and emotionally empathetic like the narrator of "The Boat." The craft that goes into the creation of these voices is a fascinating subject, but this study will attempt to limit the analysis to that "orchestration" of voices which is more directly related to thematic development and the dialectical mode.

In several ways, the narrative voice of "The Boat" is paradigmatic of the narration in over half of MacLeod's fiction. The voice is a first-person retrospective reflection from experience back toward innocence. The reliable voice, which is a bit unusual among contemporary fiction's first-person narrators, is typical in MacLeod's fiction. The voice has a fluid ability to range from present to past in that "ruminative awareness" (Nicholson 97) of the historical, the traditional, and the contemporary, which is typical of the majority of his fiction.

In this particular story he does not remain for long in his trade-mark historical present tense on which so many critics have commented (see Ricou, Story 116), but rather the narrator shifts to past tense when he moves from describing his haunted life in the American Midwestern university town (he is a professor) to describing the history and nature of the boat. From then on, except for the ending, he returns to present tense only in reflexive, metafictional comments like, "I say this now as if I knew it all then" (132), or the passage Ricou complains of, "I say this again as if it all happened at once . . ." (142), or again, "I say this now with a sense of wonder at my own stupidity" (142). All these comments are self-deprecating reflections on the narrator's own struggle to tell the story correctly, to get it right. Thus, while these shifts to "present" time (the narrator's present) are postmodern in the sense that they reflect on the process of story-telling, the author is really using the technique, not to undercut the verisimilitude or to draw attention to the artifice, but contrarily to strengthen the mimesis, the believability, and the reliability of the narrator as an unprofessional confessional story-teller. The strategy works well as the reader is pulled into the anguish of the narrator's tragic dilemma. It gives the voice authenticity as one arising, as Bakhtin would say, out of the actual social milieu of the region.

Thus, though this is clearly ironic mode fiction in the

broader sense that the narrator is distanced from the implied author as a mimetic voice or character voice, still the only ironic distance that the reader senses immediately is that which the narrator consciously reveals to us. The effective and affective character of this narrative voice wraps one in a keening tone of regret, guilt, and "fallen" knowledge. The narrator's bitter knowledge and ambivalence about his rejection of the traditional career as a fisherman stems from the conflict between his mother's perspective, which reinforces the Cape Breton fishing traditions and community ideals, and his father's perspective of his own bondage to an "idyllic" lifestyle that ironically compromises his health and happiness. In spurning his mother's traditional vision of his future, the narrator takes a full bite of the apple of choice that his father offers him, but in the retrospective process the narrative voice articulates in a tragic tone both the idyllic impulses that control his mother and community, as well as the deadly doubts and disappointments that motivate his father's sacrificial suicide.

In this fiction it is often, but not always, the women who are cast in the role of protectors of the community and family idylls, the defenders of the traditional way of life against the outside forces that threaten to destroy the myth. Some of the dynamic male characters (usually the narrators) are frequently forced to reexamine the simplistic dogma of the traditional ideals, often due to their fathers' broader

experience or due to their own education and experience. Thus, in the case of "The Boat," the dialectic pits the mother's ideals, inherited from the motivating idylls of Atlantic fishing communities, against the realism of poverty and the father's unfulfilled relationships and lifestyle. This conflict produces the ironic and tragic sacrifice of the father to redeem for his son the right to a bitter choice. It is not one of those great choices of nineteenth-century fiction for morality and freedom, where the protagonist transcends the environmental forces that would bind him, as in Tolstoy's "After the Ball." This is more of a limited choice where the environmental vice-grip of Maritime poverty and tradition offers the victim the grim alternatives of a haunted escape (the freedom of a traitor to family and community ideals) or else the betrayal of self, in what Keefer calls "the annihilating labour exacted by the sea . . . and the kind of marriage where tenderness and joy become impossible luxuries" (*Under* 234).

However, the narrator's choice is not presented simply as a mature rejection of community idyll, because the pride and pathos in the narrative voice complicate the morality of his choice. The tone of the following passage exemplifies this pride and pathos as he describes his community's defiance of the "Mounties," when they sabotage attempted fishing by outsiders in the reaches reserved by tradition for the narrator's own family:

> Twice they have gone away saying: "There are no legal boundaries in the Marine area"; "No one can own the sea"; "Those grounds don't wait for anyone."
>
> But the men and women, with my mother dark among them, do not care for what they say, for to them the grounds are sacred and they think they wait for me. (150)

The point is that MacLeod is a dedicated realist who seldom allows his characters a simple, clearly discernible right or wrong choice. He presents some community mores and behaviours that reflect well on the community idyll and on the regional mythology, and also some that reveal the limitations. He shows some idyllic values being lived out in the midst of the Cape Breton poverty, even as Buckler tried to reveal some authentic pastoral qualities in the community life of his region, even in his ironic mode. MacLeod's narrators are often caught mercilessly in a dialectic with positive community traditions and ideals in conflict with the socioeconomic deprivation and narrowness of other Cape Breton traditions, like stifling sexual roles and abuse of alcohol.

The boat, named after the mother, is a significant symbol in MacLeod's fiction. It represents the duality of Maritime tradition, because on the one hand it represents the idyllic faith that the community, the family, and the sea can provide physical and spiritual nurture and security, like a mother, from generation to generation (a form of eternal life), and on the other hand the boat represents the fateful task-master of the father, and the potential bondage of the son. The mine shafts in "The Closing Down of Summer" and in

"The Vastness of the Dark" represent the same kind of bondage, but they do not quite have the dialectically opposite idyllic signification characteristic of the boat.

Again, it is important to emphasize that MacLeod does not just pass off the idyllically nurturing aspects of the Atlantic communities as an ideal from which the naive need to be weaned. He admits the reality of the nurturing community, but he insists on the realities of alienation, alcoholism, violence, as well as sexist and sexual repression. But if "The Boat" is one of his "Songs of Experience," perhaps "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" comes closest to being a "Song of Innocence" in its remarkable thematic defence of Atlantic community nurture.

SONG OF INNOCENCE?

"The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" is the only story, in the collection that bears its title, that concentrates the thematic development so heavily on the nurturing and idyllic aspects of Atlantic community as opposed to the alienation and deprivation. The only other story that MacLeod has published that has a similar focus is "The Tuning of Perfection," where the protagonist represents the pastoral qualities of the region; however, in that case, the author manages to create room for considerable scepticism about the protagonist due to the naivety of his relationship with the greater world. There, the narrative voice maintains a certain distance in

third person, while the character foil, Carver, represents strongly the other pole of the dialectic--the effects of socioeconomic deprivation. But even in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood," the potential song of innocence is tempered by the thematic strands about the outport's isolation and the island's relationships with the outside world.

What makes the title story no simple celebration of community nurture and Atlantic idyll is the complexity of the narrative voice. The narrator himself represents the intruding outside world, and since he is the protagonist, his struggles with guilt, his recognition of his own fallen environment, and his acknowledgement of failure both in responsibility and in ability to provide equal nurture, all work together to create a tragic tone. The mother's violent death and her suggested inability to cope with the outside world also undercut the song of innocence. But it is the enigma of the narrative voice, more than any other factor, that raises questions about innocence and experience.

The story seems to supply us with a different example of MacLeod's techniques for narrowing the emotional and cognitive distances between the reader and the narrative voice. In this case it is not done through self-conscious reflections on the story-telling process, but through the narrator's wistful, guilt-ridden, tentative tone. In the first five paragraphs the narrative voice's diction is lush with imagery and landscape description. The reader does not know the origin of

the voice until the sixth paragraph where the first-person narrator finally claims ownership of the foregoing emotionally laden description. From the opening lines, one is forced to notice that the composition of the discourse violates most of Hemingway's basic principles for writing spare fiction. It is not till much later in the story that a diligent reading might discover a plausible explanation for the tone and imagery of this introduction.

The narrative voice, in its detailed initial landscape description, employs idyllic tones and similes that sometimes deliberately include pathetic fallacies, more reminiscent of Hardy or Emily Bronte than of anything in contemporary fiction. It describes the Newfoundland land mass as "blunt grey rocks that loom yearningly out toward Europe" (*Lost* 65), and it asserts that the Ireland's coast is "still the nearest land and closer now than is Toronto or Detroit" (65-66), which is not literally true. The tone and similes of these paragraphs suggest to the reader that this description might have more to do with the mind set of the mysterious narrator than with objective description.

Just before revealing himself as the observer, the narrator creates an elaborate and subtle extended metaphor of the harbour as a nurturing womb opening to the implied male organ, "the entering and withdrawing sea" (66). The image's crucial thematic implications become much clearer only toward the climax of the central conflict, but already MacLeod uses

this metaphor and the opening tone to create suspense about the origin of the narrator's emotional perspective. The suspense begins to emerge more clearly when the narrator says, without explanation, "I could easily drive away before anything might begin" (67).

MacLeod thus goes on to establish a narrator who holds back essential information about his relationship with the Newfoundlander family. This reticence is apparently due to his guilt-ridden apprehension about the unresolved conflict within his conscience as to his responsibilities toward his bastard son, raised by the grandparents in ignorance of his father's identity. The articulate narrative voice, while initially suppressing crucial background information, ironically establishes empathetic reliability with the reader. One progressively trusts more implicitly the narrator's self-conscious emotional judgements as he reveals more of his inner conflict and implies more about his relationship to the boy. Thus the suspense created by the initial secrecy is used as a characterization technique rather than for its own sake in the tradition of the "who done it." This narrative voice reveals one more of MacLeod's many narrative strategies for narrowing the emotional distance between his narrator and his reader.

The climax of the narrator's internal conflict comes in a poignant "soliloquy," a midnight guilt-confessing reverie, with enough imagistic rhetoric to make a poet envious; yet few prose writers could manage to avoid sentimental indulgence in

such passages as successfully as MacLeod. The three paragraphs starting with "Oh I would like to see my way more clearly" (83) include some fine ironic imagery aimed at himself and at his urban environment described as "the land of Tastee Freeze" and "the wrought-iron fences where the Doberman Pinscher runs silently at night" (83). These passages clarify the narrator's decision that it would be presumptuous to suggest that he could offer his son, whom he has ignored for ten years, a more nurturing environment than this home in the isolated Newfoundland outport.

This recognition of the urban condescension toward rural communities and the apparent defense of some aspects of outport lifestyle are handled more convincingly here by MacLeod than in Mitchell's similar attempt in *Roses are Difficult Here*. Again, MacLeod's achievement has a lot to do with the narrative voice being filtered through a character from outside of the community, as well as with the author's ability to engage the audience in the narrator's quest. The subjectivity and insecurity of the narrator's judgements and emotions help to avoid the sense of overt authorial persuasion that assaults the reader in the protagonist's climactic editorial in the Mitchell novel.

MacLeod appears to defend certain idyllic nurturing aspects of the outport lifestyle as being genuine and not just romantic ideals when the narrative voice sets up complementary central images that frame the main narrative. The early image

of the harbour community as a fecund womb and a nurturing environment is understood in retrospect to foreshadow the theme. But the image has a perspective peculiarly shaped by the narrator's own history and involvement with that womb. His casting of the sea as the male outsider, forcing its way like the inevitable tides into the "womb" of the harbour, parallels his own role in the creation of John (his son by the grandparents' deceased daughter), but the metaphor also has connotations of the inexorable forces of the outside world in the history of such vulnerable havens.

The other image that complements this one is the symbolic gift rock given by John to his undeclared father. The narrator sets up the image with deliberate and self-conscious language, describing the rock as follows:

> worn and polished by the unrelenting restlessness of the sea and buffed and burnished by the gravelled sand. All of its inadequacies have been removed and it glows with a lustre of near perfection. (84)

The reader becomes aware, due to the human connotations of words like "inadequacies," that the narrator is consciously describing his emotional (and partial) view of his own son as he sees him represented by the gift rock, both having been "buffed and burnished" by the same environment. Together, these images reinforce the rhetoric and irony of that aforementioned climactic "soliloquy" (83-84), as well as reinforcing the gentler irony of that final line of dialogue, "Daddy, Daddy . . . What did you bring me?" (86). This last

irony reminds us that the story is first and foremost about the struggle of the outsider to come to grips with his relationship, not just to the son, but to the Atlantic outport reality.

The larger point here is about MacLeod's skill with the ostensibly reliable narrative voice that brings us to a sympathetic hearing about urban condescension toward the Atlantic outport community ideals and lifestyles. One has to remember that the story is placed in the collection, after two opening stories, "In the Fall" and "The Vastness of the Dark," which eloquently present the tragic socioeconomic determinism of Atlantic poverty, especially the effects of deprivation on the children and young adults. Thus the story cannot be read as a challenge to the realist tradition in Atlantic fiction that often explores a sordid side of outport life, as in Horwood's *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* or Day's *Rockbound*.

If this story is, in one sense, the song of innocence in a dialectic with those songs of experience preceding and following, it is in another way, a dialectic unto itself. For example, during the climactic scene with the slightly drunk narrator hesitating and ruminating at the door of his son's bedroom and room of conception, he reflects on Yeats's Cuchulain and the Persian myth of Sohrab and Rustum. The allusions suggest that any decision he makes will not likely end the conflict for himself, nor for his son. The following final paragraph of the "soliloquy" also undercuts the

possibilities of an easy idyllic conclusion: "Again I collect dreams. For I do not know enough of the fog on Toronto's Queen St. West and of the grinding crash of the pickup and of lost and misplaced love" (83-84). This refers directly to the death of the mother and the sentimental, but ironically meaningful, folk ballads. Indirectly it refers to the tragic alienation of Atlantic young people trying for freedom by "going down the road," but failing miserably, partially because of the Atlantic rural traditions and the expectations of community ingrained within them. So if this indeed is the song of innocence in this collection, it has all the complexity of Blake's lamb in relation to the Tyger, or "The Little Black Boy" in "Songs of Innocence."

HYMNS TO DEATH AND THE VOID

MacLeod defends the reality of rural Atlantic nurture and some other aspects of idyllic community in almost every story to a greater or lesser extent, but he is also a keen observer of the social and cultural devastation in some areas brought about by changes in the larger economy and the larger societies. In "The Vastness of the Dark" he establishes an ironic distance between the implied author and the Cape Breton narrator who has decided to "go down the road" because it is his eighteenth birthday and it is time, as he says, to escape the "grimy Cape Breton coal-mining town whose prisoner I have been for all of my life" (39). Like the pit-horses that work

most of their lives in the dark (40), he is blinded by his environment and blind to the forces and motivations that control him. Like the opening story, "In the Fall," it reveals the grinding poverty and its corollaries, but with an even starker irony crafted by the narrative strategy.

The alcoholism, incest, and violence are violations of community and family nurture, violations of the societal idyll, of which the youth has little understanding, yet MacLeod leaves the signposts of the socioeconomic roots of this corruption all along the boy's blind path of flight. The epiphany of insight into his identity is revealed as small consolation for the havoc of the larger destruction in his life and in the life of the communities, especially as he seems headed back to the bondage of the mines with other Cape Breton expatriates. But this hymn to the vastness of the dark is orchestrated by that standard ironic mode strategy of the unreliable first-person narrator, which is not a common strategy for MacLeod, though he crafts it convincingly.

The closing story of the collection, "The Road to Rankin's Point," is in part another hymn to death and the void. Its narrative strategy is again played out in MacLeod's strongest mode, a meditative reliable first-person narrative voice. The pace of the outer plot is as plodding and relentless as a slow death, whereas the inner conflict is tense with the mental struggle of the twenty-six year old narrator trying to come to terms with the imminent death

promised him by his doctor. The narrative voice develops a keening tone as it describes the small unhurried roads leading into the broad highway taking people out of Cape Breton toward the greater allures of a broader existence. The narrator contrasts that to his own return from the broader roads to the narrower, until he is headed up the tortuous eroded dead-end path to Rankin's Point and his ancestor's farm where an aged Grandmother is fending off the ignominies of impending death. He completes that imagery by comparing his reason for returning to that of the "diseased and polluted salmon, to swim for a brief time in the clear waters of my earlier stream" (174), clearly referring to his pastoral heritage.

A common thematic strand of the passing of the rural Gaelic culture and lifestyle is pervasive in many of the stories, as it is in this one, but here it is subject to the larger theme of the implacable and inscrutable imminence of death. The narrator notes the ruins of other abandoned farms, and that his grandmother's will be the last to be abandoned. He notes that she no longer has to worry about the purity of the blood lines for her livestock, since only the bleating cries of *her* sheep "reverberate across these high cleansed hills" (163), "cleansed" ironically by time and death. It is a cryptic comment on the fleeting efforts of humans. The degeneration of the livestock (due to his grandmother's failing abilities) and her history of hardships both contrast with any simplistic notions of Edenic idyll, yet there is no

doubt that the keening tone is part of what Frye calls "genuinely imaginative" pastoral (*Bush* 241) or sophisticated idyllic impulse.

But the central conflict is the narrator's attempt to find some way of relating these values and traditions to the cold facts of the imminent deaths of the grandmother, of himself, and of the human presence that once dominated the mountain. The grandmother's resistance to the family's plan to move her from the mountain is heroic and humorous. Her pithy maxim is, "It does not matter that some things are difficult. No one has ever said life is to be easy. Only that it is to be lived" (181). The narrator admits that he has come to Rankin's Point "hoping to find such strength for the living of [his] life and the meeting of [his] death" (181), but in the following passage, with the tone of a modern Ecclesiastes, he also admits the ultimate futility of finding lasting security in the idyll of his heritage:

> I would go back though the superstitions and the herbal remedies and the fatalistic war cries and the haunting violins and the cancer cures of cobwebs. Back through the knowledge of being and its end as understood through the second sight and spectral visions and the intuitive dog and the sea bird's cry. I would go back to the priest with the magic hands. Back to the faith healer if only I had more faith. Back to anything rather than to die at the objective hands of mute, cold science. (184-85)

If the existential theme needed to be reinforced beyond this, Calum's final meditation removes all ambiguity:

> For the first time in the centuries since the Scottish emigrations there is no human life at the

> end of this dark road. I turn again to the open sea and concentrate very hard on seeing something but it is no use. I look down into the darkness beneath my feet but there too there is only a darkened void although I can hear the waters lapping gently on the boulders far below. (187)

This is MacLeod's final word in the collection on the dialectic between Cape Breton's idyllic impulses and a darker mimetic realism. Surely it is a hymn to death and the void, yet there remain those words and the example of the grandmother, that "life is to be lived," and according to MacLeod, there are some small existential victories in doing that with dignity and intelligence.

Janice Kulyk Keefer summarizes the scope and profundity of MacLeod's fiction with comparisons to the role of other modern and contemporary fiction in the region. She says,

> the fundamental point of difference between the other writers discussed in this chapter and MacLeod can be found in the close connection between the material and the metaphysical on which his realism insists. Nowlan and Richards are concerned primarily with life in a surface hell. . . . But MacLeod . . . is also concerned to show us how their entrapment has a significance which transcends particulars of period and place by the universals of time and death. (*Under* 183-84)

There seems to be a broadening critical consensus forming in favour of this judgement. However, the universals she identifies need to be understood in a broad context in order to appreciate their full significance in her aesthetic evaluation. Time here has to do with a sense of history, that is to say, an understanding of the forces in history that defend and promote the mythology of the regional culture, as

well as those forces that erode the mythologies and the cultural idylls, and again any forces that might create new mythology and new idyllic impulses. These forces are observed and examined in MacLeod's *Lost Salt Gift of Blood*, and continue to be examined in *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*.

THE DIALECTIC PERSONIFIED: PERFECTION AND DISSONANCE

One story, "The Tuning of Perfection," in MacLeod's second collection, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, stands out from the others structurally and stylistically in its overt exemplification of the dialectic between the idyllic and socioeconomic realism. MacLeod employs a third person narrative voice that is usually filtered through the protagonist, Archibald. Although he does not use third person in any other story in this collection, the more striking structural difference is the extent to which the two central characters are archetypes of two Atlantic extremes. Archibald is an archetypal defender of the old Gaelic tradition and guardian of the community ideals, while Carver is an archetypal hard drinking, hard working, hard living survivor and product of the disastrous socioeconomic decline of Cape Breton. Archibald almost personifies the Gaelic idyllic rural tradition in his mountain garden, while Carver is the dialectically opposite materialistic, cynical realist of everyday valley life.

Although, there are these clear aspects that could

suggest a tale, MacLeod manages to give the characters credibility, depth, and dynamic response to the opposing character foils. Archibald, for example, is characterized indirectly through Carver's respectful reactions to him. For example, he articulates the image of Archibald as a kind of keeper of a mountain Eden, in the following passage:

> "Your timber here on your land is as good as ever, they say." . . . "they say, `no one knows where he gets all them logs, hauls them out with them horses and doesn't seem to disturb anything. Year after year. Treats the mountain as if it were a garden.'" (Birds 116-17)

Carver also makes a point of protecting the interests and dignity of the naive Archibald from the horse buyer that wants one of Archibald's mares for the production of birth control pills from the estrogen in pregnant mare's urine. Carver knows that Archibald's ancient and traditional attitude toward sexuality has not yet accommodated the pill, nor does his concept of exploitation of horses include anything but the harness. A similar character foil relationship is obvious when Carver, annoyed by some suspicious questioning, snaps at the dealer, "I told you this man don't lie." (115). MacLeod manages to breathe more reality into Archibald as well, by his brooding self-doubts in the filtered narrative voice; these doubts are contrasted with Carver's brash self-assuredness.

The major conflict has to do with Archibald's reputation as a Gaelic folklorist and folk singer. A television producer wants to have Archibald and his family descendants sing for a gala performance in Halifax before royalty and television

cameras, but Archibald refuses to compromise the songs by cutting them to the required length. The conflict intensifies when the producer chooses to go with Carver and some of his drinking buddies who sing a popular but unauthentic folk-song. MacLeod's juxtaposition of idyllic values against a darker realism peaks when Archibald challenges Carver on what to him is crass sacrilege, an insult to their culture, at least to any knowledgeable folklorist. Carver of course is doing it for the best of all possible reasons, the money; it is needed to repair a boat engine to survive the fishing season. So Carver's brazen reply to the old folklorist's objection is, "Yeah, maybe so . . . but me, I don't know no folklorists" (129). The dialectic between the idyllic and the realities of Atlantic socioeconomic deprivation is played out here in the clash of archetypal characters--almost dual protagonists and foils, rather than the protagonist and antagonist of simple romance.

Again MacLeod reveals an ability to create archetypal characters without damaging the basic mimetic realism. The credibility of Carver's character is strengthened by the recriminations he suffers because of his insult to Archibald. Archibald's doubts, due to his alienation from the family and his vulnerability and fear of the "outside" attackers, in the final scene, increase the realism and set up the pathos and comedy of Carver's dramatic apology when he arrives with his drunken friends, scarred from a brawl and carrying cases of

liquor delivered to Archibald as a peace offering in the middle of a stormy fear-filled night. Archibald's response to the gift is a good example of MacLeod's ability to handle a potentially sentimental subject by avoiding the precious, yet finding the raw, credible emotion. The narrative voice records his thoughts as follows:

> Somehow it [the gift] moved him even more. And he was aware of its cost in many ways.
>
> He also envied them their closeness and their fierceness and what the producer fellow had called their tremendous energy. And he imagined that it was men like they who had given, in their recklessness, all they could think of in that confused and stormy past. Going with their claymores and the misunderstood language of their warcries to "perform" for the Royal Families of the past. But he was not sure of that either. (134)

The imagining is ironically appropriate to Archibald, since he had imagined himself wielding his giant poker as a highland sword just minutes before. The irony of the word "perform" unites the two men in their common Gaelic nationalism. Carver's final words are, "Look, Archibald . . . We know. We know. We *really* know" (134). The implication is that he recognizes the real protector of the lore, the guardian of the Mountain Garden and of the cultural ideals.

So MacLeod creates two polarized archetypes: one of Cape Breton's past and one of its present, one of Cape Breton's pastoral ideal and one its socioeconomic reality. Thus he delivers his most overt dialectic within a single story with the thematic suggestion that the reality of life in Cape Breton cannot be understood clearly if either one of the

archetypes is presented separately as the whole truth. He suggests that the depth of the deprivation and loss cannot be understood without some knowledge of the pastoral ideals and the community's mythos.

THE BIG GREY DOGS OF DEATH

Two stories in this second collection involve the relationship between dogs and men, but the underlying conflict in both involves a narrator and his family responding to the stress of a relative in a death-bed situation; thus the stories engage dialectic realism to the extent that they scrutinize the society's idyllic and traditional mechanisms for coping with death, many of which come directly from the dominant mythologies of the society. One story seems more powerful than the other, partially due to a more successful narrative strategy, and partially because the narrative voice in "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun" develops the universal thematic implications that so many critics have mentioned, while the narrative voice in "Winter Dog" is intended to manage similar profundity and breadth, but falls a bit short in the opinion of some critics.

Louise Erdrich implies that "Winter Dog" is the story that "lapses when the writer works with cliched situations such as that of a boy saved by his dog" (15). There are some lapses in the diction and rigour of the narrative voice, but not, it could be argued, necessarily because of the cliched

situation. MacLeod is noted for "playing on thin ice" with potentially cliched material and working through it with integrity and power, as we have seen in "The Tuning of Perfection" and "The Road to Rankin's Point." He seems to take it as a challenge much in the way that Thoreau would resuscitate dead metaphors.

If this story is not wholly successful in such an endeavour, it is the exception rather than the rule in MacLeod's fiction. Part of the problem stems from the opening narrative of the dying relative, which does not surface again until the conclusion of the story where it does not do enough, it could be argued, to universalize the experience of death or the threat of death. The great existential statements on that subject that we find in "The Closing Down of Summer," in "The Road to Rankin's Point," and in "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun" seem to be missing from "Winter Dog." It has some evocative and gripping narrative passages and some poignant narrative shifts, but it also has a few odd lines where the narrative voice grows slack, as in the following: "I was never to tell anyone of the afternoon's experience [his rescue by the dog] or that he had saved my life" (55). The last phrase seems rather unnecessary or a weak expression of the point. A couple of phrases in the closing paragraphs also do not seem to pull their weight emotionally:

> It is too bad that I could not have saved him as well and my feelings did him little good as I looked upon his bloodied body there beside the road. . . .

He was with us only for a little while. (57)

These common banalities about death in the first and final lines here are not at all typical of this story, and it may well be that MacLeod is attempting some mimetic effect with the narrator's voice, but even a couple of slips like these can compromise a good attempt at resuscitating such a cliched situation as a dog saving a boy. I think this criticism could not be levelled at any of his other stories.

In fact the profundity and sustained power of the narrative voices in "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun" and "The Closing Down of Summer" seem to have overshadowed the possible slips in "Winter Dog" for most critics. The big grey dog of death is a startling and unusual image in MacLeod's title story. This is not the image of one of those canine spectres at Hades' entrance. This is an affectionate, well-meaning orphan, a surprise on the horizon of one's life. Due to the way the old man succours this dog and helps her breed when she is in heat, one senses that the dog must ironically represent the surprising fecundity and warmth of life as well as the viciousness, violence, and fearfulness of death. Critics have not generally responded to those first aspects of the dog's significance. As the reality of the dog's known history grows into the mythology of the "big grey dog of Death," naturally the ironic spectre of death overshadows the connotations of fecundity and companionship, and rightly so in a story with overtones of a gothic tale, like this one.

Of course that is the anomaly of this narrative strategy: it only begins as a gothic tale--"Once there was a family with a highland name that lived beside the sea" (137). The apparently third person voice of the raconteur, which articulates the tale of the man's tragic death at the hands of his dog's offspring, is finally revealed as the voice of a first person narrator, a descendent of the original protector of the dog. At that narrative shift the tale becomes more obviously a story in a realistic mode about the narrator and five brothers gathering at their father's death-bed, attempting to cope with this inscrutable finality, and with the family mythology about the preternatural visions of the *cu mor glas a' bhais* (the big grey dog of death), the harbinger of imminent death.

The title is an ironic part of the narrator's defense of the family myth. Against charges of superstition, he argues,

> we are aware that it may become confused with what the doctors call "the will to live" and we are aware that some beliefs are what others would dismiss as "garbage." We are aware that there are men who believe the earth is flat and that the birds bring forth the sun. (146)

The implied argument is that perhaps the family is not confusing cause and effect at all. Perhaps the psychology of man's materialistic preoccupation needs the shock of that grim premonition of death and a knowledge of the vision's power, in order to reconcile the mind to our relationship with death. The six grey-haired brothers parallel the six grey-haired pups that killed their archetypal ancestor by misunderstanding

"like so many armies, the intention of their leader" (140). Such similes help to universalize the significance of the local legend. Even though the brothers' lives are often wilfully removed from the claims of the Gaelic tradition and the mythology of their Cape Breton heritage, they cannot finally escape the claims of the Gaelic folk culture nor of the big grey dog. The message is universal in that respect; few of us can escape the influence of the myths in our heritage, especially when it comes to death, "when we hear the scrabble of the paws and the scratching at the door" (146). The suggestion is that though we know that premonitions and many other aspects of how our cultures address death are idyllic responses having more to do with cultural mythology than with reality, still the cultural mythologies usually assert themselves as death approaches.

So although the most obvious dialectic in this story is the structurally entwined modes of romance and realism, still the story engenders a thematic dialectic about the role of idyll and mythology in our societies' handling of death. The paradoxical imagery of the fecund live dog and the spectral legendary dog creates a definite sub-text about the virile Gaelic culture and its passing, as well as the more obvious and universal statement about the role of mythological beliefs and ideals in coping with death's inevitability, and its advancing proximity.

UNUSUAL NARRATIVE STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE "SECOND SIGHT"

A profound thematic grappling with mortality pervades most of MacLeod's best work and often anchors the mimetic realist pole of the dialectical realism, while the local culture's idyllic visions and versions of a fulfilled life and a "correct" death provide the other pole of the dialectic. For example, "The Closing Down of Summer" ends with some lines from an anonymous fifteenth-century lyric. The persona is a king, a knight of renown, and two of his final lines are, "No fights me taught the death to quell" and "I wende to be clad in clay" (*As* 36). Yet both this story and "Vision" emphasize the struggle on the part of the narrator to understand how his present lifestyle and his heritage relate to that central fact of his mortality. Thus these two become stories with that greater substance and scope usually reserved for novellas or novels.

In "The Closing Down of Summer" the surface narrative as Sullivan suggests, "is barely a story at all, but a finely wrought meditation on death by the leader of a mining crew" (25). This refers to the fact that the story has no dialogue and little plot other than the weather watch on the beach to see if the coming storm will signal the closing down of the summer's healing rest and the return to the confines of the mining shaft. That universal shaft that alienates humans from their larger society becomes a central metaphor. Part of the narrative voice's effectiveness has to do with the first

person plural voice that shifts effortlessly to first person singular and back to plural, moving from the group experience to the narrator's particular experiences of death and isolation, and back to the universal experiences and the universal applications. However, it is much more than a meditation on death. Keefer describes the narrative as a "gentle raging against a variety of nights" (*Under* 237).

The central image of the shaft brings out the larger questions of incarceration, exploitation, and isolation in our chosen professions and lifestyles. It becomes an ironic but universalized attempt to communicate to the outside world from the prison of the shaft, to assert the identity, dignity, and self-image which the miner takes from his labour. One can see these connotations developing in the following passage: "In the chill and damp we have given ourselves to the breaking down of walls and barriers . . . sentenced ourselves to enclosures. . . . Always hopeful of breaking through" (30). Again his urge to communicate to his family and to assert some meaning into this headlong push toward death are reflected in this passage:

> I have always wished that my children could see me at my work. That they might journey down with me in the dripping cage to the shafts bottom or walk the eerie tunnels or the drifts that end in walls of staring stone. And that they might see how articulate we are in the accomplishment of what we do. . . . there is perhaps a certain eloquent beauty to be found in what we do. . . . beauty of motion on the edge of violence. (28-29)

So the narrative is partially a naturalistic reflection on the

socioeconomic forces that create the estranged world of the hard-rock miner and partially a bittersweet celebration of the miners' dignity and endurance in the face of his exploitation and his tunnelling toward death. The naturalistic tone to the narratives of accidental death, normalization of fear, and alienation from family and society, acts as a counterpoint to the well established folk traditions of glorifying the "salt-of-the-earth" miner. This idyllic side of the dialectic is referred to in allusions to the Gaelic ballads, the Celtic Revival, the MacKinnon's Miner Chorus (24), and the narrator's comparison of himself to "a figure in some mediaeval ballad who has completed his formal farewells and goes now to meet his fatalistic future" (35). As the narrative voice attempts to examine the myth of the miner as a part of his own bondage, and counters with attempts to articulate his own reality, the narrator's intelligence, self-consciousness, and sensitivity also add to the dialectical counterpoint and to the destruction of romantic stereotypes of miners.

The narrator's struggle to see beyond the environmentally determined confines of his heritage, his mythological orientation, and his traditional lifestyle is also the central conflict for the narrator of "Vision." This story is perhaps the most complex in narrative strategy and in thematic development. Erdrich calls it his "most extraordinary" story, and praises its narrative drive and breadth of theme (15). As in "The Boat," MacLeod employs an educated narrator who is

also an amateurish writer attempting to sort out the meaning of his own story as best he can. This narrator often pauses in his narrative to comment almost apologetically on the organization and tangents of his story. For example, he begins with an external frame: "I don't remember when I first heard the story, but I remember the first time I heard the story and remembered it" (149). Later he effects a narrative shift with "On the day of the remembered story..." (152). He continually reminds us that he is merely the collector of a number of stories, and tales within stories that relate tangentially to the larger story of who he has become, where he comes from, and what forces formed him.

The narrator's reflexive comments on his story are part of a narrative strategy by MacLeod similar to the one used in "The Boat" to decrease the emotional distance between the implied author and the narrator and to increase the reader's empathy with and trust of the narrator. Notice how the following passages reflect this:

> When I began this story, I was recounting the story which my father told to me. . . . But when I look on it now I realize that all of it did not come from him, exactly as I have told it. (183-84)
>
> This has been the telling of a story about a story but like most stories it has spun off into others and relied on others and perhaps no story really ever stands alone. (188)
>
> As I write this, my own small daughter comes in from kindergarten. (188)

None of these reflexive incursions are there merely to draw attention to process and artifice as in much of postmodern

metafiction. Rather, they are attempts both to strengthen and to camouflage the artifice in order to engage the reader emotionally with a reliable narrator, to make us believe in his struggles to pull it all together--both the strands of the story and the "strands" (189) of the theme.

The diction also contributes to the disarming lack of pretension in the narrator's voice. For example, in the first paragraph he introduces an analogy between the effect of his father's story and a cut on the hand. He uses at least three sentence fragments and the more vernacular second person address--for example, "Something like when you cut your hand" (149). Again, at the end of the analogy he comments self-consciously on the appropriateness of his image, saying "it is something like that, although you know that in one case the future scar will be forever on the outside . . ." (149). Also in many instances the diction suggests a simple transcription of the contributing oral narratives. Thus the strategy of closing the distances between author, narrator, and reader reinforces the artifice of the unpretentious, self-conscious, self-searching narrator. From the raw power of that first image of the cut hand and onward, one is pulled into the emotional earnestness and integrity of a narrator struggling to achieve the "second sight" about his heritage and his socialization.

The twin motifs of blindness and second sight are developed throughout by the repetition of certain words and

images relating to uncertainty, lack of recognition, impaired sight, heightened sight, and visionary sight (the *Da Shealladh*). So, by the time one reaches the final images, like "Difficult to ever see and understand the twisted strands within the rope" (189), the connotations have coalesced into significant insights into the psychological and emotional blindness that can be conditioned by one's heritage and one's socioeconomic environment. Such naturalistic insight is much more commonly achieved through increasing the ironic and emotional distance between the narrative voice and the implied author, as in the fiction of Vanderhaeghe.

One of the most striking images supporting this theme is the imaginative description from the narrator's father of the blind great-grandmother's death. She is one of MacLeod's strongest and most fully characterized women (the protagonist of *Island* being another). This dark, passionate, and tragic lover of Mac an Amharius (a great-grandfather to the narrator) is one of the victims of the isolated society's narrowness and prejudice. In the following passage the fire becomes symbolic of her jealousy and passion, while the house becomes a symbol of her tragic life:

> They imagined her strong hands pulling down the wainscotting of her own home and placing it in the fire, consuming her own house somehow from within as it was later to consume her. And they could see the fire going up the front of her dirty clothing. Consuming the dirt which she herself had been unable to see. . . . the imaginary orange flames flickering and framing her face and being reflected in the staring lenses of her glasses. (176)

This is a haunting story of a people controlled by two opposing forces: on one hand, their mythologized history and their related idyllic traditions, and on the other hand, their often destructive passions, pride, and blindness.

The idyllic traditions are highlighted by Mac an Amharuis's revelations about the church and the parish being named after St. Columba and the ancient (rather holy) island of Canna. Mac an Amharuis says of the ancient legends of the island and of his heroic saint and seer, Colum Cille, "yes, sometimes I feel I know him and I think I see him as well" (171). And again he says,

> That is why this place is called Canna and we carry certain things within us. Sometimes there are things within us that we do not know or fully understand and sometimes it is hard to stamp out what you can't see. (172)

These "things within" that he carries are the notions of an idyllic "green island" (171), and the idealization of the saint's character and power, but when he suspects similar powers of leadership and "second sight" within himself, he finds them to be an impossible ideal, an impossible burden, so that this becomes a typical conflict between the idyllic tradition and the more complicated realism of living with such ideals and beliefs. The irony is magnified when he calls upon the priest to exorcise his supernatural "second sight." The imagery of the priest's arms binding him (179) suggests the narrowness of the religious leader robbing him not only of his supernatural power, but also of his sexual potency, and by

implication, the Celtic "things within" that he "can't see" and does not "know or fully understand" (172). This conflict is the archetype for the narrator's own struggle to understand the limitations and benefits of his heritage. The limitations are typified by his friend, Kenneth, whose literal blinding compromises some youthful romantic ideals and ambitions. Thus, in the collection's closing story the reader again discovers a dialectic of idyllic impulses with the darker realities of passion, pride, and ignorance, a dialectic of mythologically influenced ideals and potential juxtaposed against the vice-grip of environmental determinism.

The orchestration of the many voices into one narrative and the compelling authenticity of the narrative voice make this a strong conclusion to the collection. Keefer says that in the stories of *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*,

> MacLeod has discovered narrative and rhetorical strategies for `breaking through' in his writing without `breaking free' of his native region. It is a paradigm MacLeod's fellow writers can explore and rework for themselves, finding new ways of using the particulars of their time and place to break through the enclosures which prevent us from knowing ourselves and our world. (*Under* 237-38)

Her quoted references and allusions are to the theme of "The Closing Down of Summer," but the passage speaks eloquently to the theme and craft of "Vision," as well as to his fiction in general. *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun* proves that those early colleagues and critics of MacLeod were not wrong to suggest, after the publication of only one collection of stories, that a major talent had arrived in Canadian fiction.

THE CLOSING DOWN OF THE ISLAND

The imagery of the chapter title, which compares Cape Breton to Atlantis, is certainly relevant to MacLeod's novella, *Island* (Thistledown 1989). In many ways, the closing down of the Island's lighthouse, the "manned" lighthouse, is metonymical of the closing down of a way of life and a traditional culture in Cape Breton. This story of tradition, passion, isolation, and the all-effacing hand of time is like a miniature of the conflicts in the majority of his Cape Breton stories. Perhaps due to MacLeod's atypical choice of third person narrative voice and the naivety of the protagonist, this story reminds one of "The Tuning of Perfection." The loner in the lighthouse and the loner at the top of the mountain both are representative characters in various ways. In a sense, they both represent a dying Gaelic culture and the closing down of an era in Cape Breton. Naturally, these themes could be treated either through naive idyll or in a more complex realistic way that does not ignore the role of the idyllic. As we have seen previously, MacLeod chooses the latter. In this story, the narrative voice seems to elevate the protagonist and the setting to a symbolic, or perhaps metonymical level, without failing to establish the detailed realism.

This argument that the Island is metonymical of Cape Breton Island, and that the MacPhedran daughter (the only one born upon this island) can represent the passing Gaelic

culture is based upon a few structural and stylistic details, as well as on the general parallels. We are never told her first name nor the Island's name except that it is unofficially referred to by their family name. The tone has some affinities with tales in the romantic mode, and to the outside world she is, indeed, part of the "romance" of the island. She is described in third person with considerable objective distance between the implied author and the protagonist, which is unusual for MacLeod if he intends to create in-depth characterization. Her conversation is limited to mostly memorable and significant responses, like her trademark "Oh yes" to life in general, to sexual passion in particular, and to the romance of leaving the Island with her imagined lover. Some of the phrases of her first lover are echoed eerily by her grandson when he comes to take her from the island, as her first lover promised he would. Then too, in the middle of her dream-like perception of his rescue, the rescuing grandson utters that Cinderella-like line, "This boat . . . has to be back before dawn" (*Island* 50). Thus, one might expect a tale-like second level of meaning.

There are several minor parallels between the Island and Cape Breton as well. For example, one wonders if MacLeod is thinking of Cape Breton when the narrator says, "Mainland boat operators began to offer `trips around the island,' taking tourists on circumnavigational voyages" (42), and again just following that, "she later realized, she had passed into

folklore" (43). Perhaps these are comments on how the "quaint" communities of Cape Breton have found themselves becoming a tourist attraction. The government's relationship to the Island is fairly remote, except for the final closing down of the old light. Of course, the government and its "modern technology" close down the Island even as they sometimes appear to be playing that role in the closing down of Cape Breton.

A remarkable feature of the story is that after all these signs of the larger-than-life tale, the novella has so much realistic detail that one is not inclined immediately to read it as a tale. Nevertheless, the broader themes of isolation and tradition, which one might derive from a realistic reading, are very much compatible with the metonymical or symbolic reading. The protagonist displays the passionate, romantic nature of the Gaelic pastoral tradition. Her spontaneous sexual encounter with the old fisherman on the beach, beside the spawning mackerel reaches, has mythological overtones suggesting the virility of the Gaelic cultural myth.

Read as realism, the story has much to say about the effects of isolation and the inclination of old age to bring the ghost of the idyllic back to life. Read as a tale, the theme says similar things about a dying culture reaching back to the dream world of the idyll, just before the closing down of the old ways. The final lines are, "A dog barked once. And when the light revolved, its solitary beam found no

MacPhedrans on the island or the sea" (50). Ironically, modern technology has erased all apparent need for the Gaelic community ideals as it erased the need for the family tradition of manning the light on the Island, but we sense that the woman's near faery-tale passing from the Island is as much a statement about the passing romance of the Gaelic culture as it is about a metaphorical "closing down" of Cape Breton's traditional economy and potential. Nevertheless, it is strongly in MacLeod's tradition of the dialectic between the idyllic impulses and the real.

MACLEOD AS A NEW PARADIGM

Keefer argues in one of the major conclusions of *Under Eastern Eyes* that MacLeod finds contemporary means and modes through his "narrative and rhetorical strategies" (237) to create a fiction out of regional material that reflects a powerful sense of place, which she sees as "the dethroning of MacLennan's paradigm" (238), by which she mainly means his perceived artistic rejection of regional roots. She also speaks of "the questioning of Buckler's" (238) paradigm, by which she seems to mean a rather narrow embrace of the regional roots without achieving the kind of universal and metaphysical breadth and depth of MacLeod's best work.

If one agrees that MacLeod's best work offers a new paradigm and new direction for the Atlantic tradition in fiction, one should hasten to add that it is not the only

possible paradigm for the Atlantic region, obviously. The strict ironic mode with naturalistic overtones employed by David Adams Richards and often by Alden Nowlan continues to be used by many writers to evoke a strong sense of place, so there seems to be no intrinsic reason why the scope or potential of Atlantic fiction should be limited by or to any particular paradigm. But perhaps Keefer does not mean to go as far as she seems to suggest (*Under* 184). If one agrees that this new paradigm for Atlantic fiction has a lot to do with MacLeod's ability to juxtapose the local idyllic impulses in a hard-nosed manner against the socioeconomic realities of the region, then one must also consider that he did not create this mode out of nothing. Buckler had already found some success in this mode in *The Mountain and the Valley* and in a few of his more successful short stories, though admittedly his predominantly psychological novels might have less breadth in addressing social, cultural, existential, and other metaphysical issues.

This study would argue that the mode owes something to W.O. Mitchell as well, and that Mitchell certainly proves that this is not an exclusively Atlantic nor Maritime paradigm for fiction. While Mitchell shows that this mode of dialectic realism can be used toward comic and tragicomic ends, MacLeod mainly moves the dialectic towards a tragic tone. His juxtaposition of the region's idyllic impulses against the darker realities of Atlantic life forges (as in Mitchell's

best fiction) a synthesis of mimetic realism, often a kind of social realism in MacLeod's case, where the vanities of naive idyll and limiting aspects of regional mythologies are fired and hammered away as dross in pursuit of a refined and clear-eyed vision of life in this region, including all its hopes, ideals, illusions, tragedies, poverty, and at times even some wealth.

Together, Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod have helped to establish a variant mode of Canadian fiction, loosely described here as dialectical realism, that seems to have great potential for evoking a distinctive sense of place. As Keefer and Harrison have also suggested, these writers are part of the new paradigms, the new and broader mainstream. These three writers have proved internationally and nationally that any concept of a Canadian mainstream must reckon with the voices of MacLeod's Cape Breton, of Buckler's valley, and of Mitchell's prairie.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

Chapter 5: VANDERHAEGHE: VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS WITHIN

VANDERHAEGHE'S MODE AS A COUNTERPOINT

Vanderhaeghe's fiction is important to this study because his narrative styles, structures, and modes are often in sharp contrast to their equivalents in the fiction of MacLeod, Mitchell, and Buckler. For example, a sense of place can certainly be discovered in Vanderhaeghe's fiction, but it is not usually developed by juxtaposing idyllic notions against mimetic realism. Also there is often less emphasis on a sense of the physical landscape such as we might expect from Mitchell, Buckler, or MacLeod. Of course, this study and others suggest that sense of place includes much more than descriptions of geographical landscape.

Such contrasts help to limit the kinds of broad generalizations often expected from Canadian studies of regional or national fiction. For example, the inclusion of Vanderhaeghe's fiction might help to challenge two popular generalizations and myths about Canadian fiction. One is that our fiction should be moving towards a single homogenous mainstream either in theme or style. Some, like Ronald Sutherland in *Second Image*, might argue for a particularly Central Canadian definition of this mainstream (as previously discussed), suggesting that certain themes or subjects build a "Canadian" identity for our literature. Some might argue

for a single homogenous, perhaps more international style, as some Canadian high modernists advocated some decades ago, though that is less likely now with international fiction's eclecticism. Both these versions of the ideal mainstream seem to exclude a good deal of excellent Canadian fiction like Vanderhaeghe's or MacLeod's, perhaps because such generalizations have more to do with certain critical agendas than with what is actually being written.

More important for this study is the other popular and more widely held generalization, which suggests that the literature of Canada's *regions* should have some homogenous mainstream or at least a common vision inspired by certain archetypal landscapes, like sea or prairie. This study argues that the stark contrasts between Vanderhaeghe's fiction and Mitchell's fiction should help to defuse this misguided generalization. Eli Mandel, in "Romance and Realism in Western Canadian Fiction," observes that "any cultural history of Western Canada simply must begin with this problem of pluralism" (199). He says this in response to the diversity of genres, modes, and themes in Western Canadian Fiction. He argues against this "common regional vision" in the following:

> To speak, for example, of something central to the imagination of Western Canada scarcely makes any sense in the light both of the variety of Western Canadian fiction and the virtual impossibility of deciding what it means to speak of the "West" itself. There is no single kind or genre of Western fiction in Canada: there are regional novels, rural novels, ethnic novels, pastorals, urban novels. And these, in turn, reflect a bewildering variety of concerns and themes. (199)

What he argues for Western Canadian fiction can also be argued for prairie fiction. Here, as in other essays, Mandel challenges those who "resort to the kind of environmentalism that sees the land itself as the determining feature" (199) of prairie fiction, suggesting that both Edward McCourt and Henry Kreisel sometimes tend toward such reasoning. Mandel's points are well taken, and Vanderhaeghe's fiction would certainly seem to challenge such oversimplifications of regional literature, as well.

One senses a large urban influence in his fiction, despite the settings of some stories in small mining towns that have affinities with Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, where Vanderhaeghe was born and raised. One also senses the author's awareness of history, sociology, and other behavioral sciences (Vanderhaeghe has an M.A. in History). An urbane wit and a cosmopolitan knowledge of the larger Western Culture are also evident in many stories. These are all influences that Bakhtin believes should be orchestrating the dialogized voices in good fiction. So this is what Vanderhaeghe's fiction has in common with Mitchell's and MacLeod's--a talent for revealing a sense of the regional social milieu in the language styles and structures of his dialogized voices, while the thematic development provides the overall orchestration of voices a universal context.

Vanderhaeghe's fictional voices seem to come from a psychological and social wilderness as opposed to a

geographical wilderness. The voices are toughened or blighted by a landscape of privileged hierarchies, fears, dysfunctional behaviour, foibles, and disastrous lack of self-esteem. Thus, the territory he explores is the human mind and its relation to the social and cultural dynamics more than to the physical geography. These are minds fashioned by, and fighting against, a social geography as bleak, impassive, and uncaring as the winds of Horizon in *As For Me And My House*.

So Vanderhaeghe's mode for developing sense of place hardly ever involves the regional idyllic impulses in dialectic with mimetic realism, the mode common to Mitchell and MacLeod. He avoids most patterns of local regional idyll or pastoral impulse especially if it has to do with physical landscape; Mitchell's stooks, elevators, and panoramic prairie are conspicuously absent here. On the other hand, he evokes those other more social aspects of sense of place through dialogized voices in ways similar to Mitchell and MacLeod. These voices are obviously "not merely transmitted or reproduced" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 332) voices, but language dialogized, "permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self parody" (*Dialogic* 7), arising from the actual "dialogue of languages that exist in a given era" (417). Bakhtin's description of good dialogized fiction seems like a running description of Vanderhaeghe's mode and style.

So if description of physical geography and dialectical realism are not the distinguishing features of his fiction,

one can at least observe that the narrative voices and the dialogue do reflect the influence of the social geography, including the larger cultural and literary milieu as well as the languages of the regional socioeconomic milieu. This is why Bakhtin's "poetics" for the criticism of fiction, although perhaps incomplete, appear to be quite amenable for the analysis of these particular stories. He says,

> the real task of stylistic analysis consists in uncovering all the available orchestrating languages in the composition of the novel, grasping the precise degree of distancing. . . . (*Dialogic* 416)

Certainly the distancing of the narrative voices from the author is an important strategy in Vanderhaeghe's work, but Bakhtin is also asking the critic to understand the sociological and environmental realities in the region and the era which create the languages on which the fiction draws. He says:

> A stylistic analysis of the novel cannot be productive outside a profound understanding of heteroglossia, and understanding of the dialogue of languages as it exists in a given era. But in order to understand such dialogue . . . mere knowledge of the linguistic and stylistic profile of the languages involved will be insufficient; what is needed is a profound understanding of each language's socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering of all other ideological voices of the era. (417)

Whether the dogmatic and demanding tone of phrases like "cannot be productive" is warranted or not, the strategy seems to imply that the critic needs a broader interest in the region and era from which the voices originate, and an

interest in what the voices reveal about that time and place. That broader interest seems important in analyzing this fiction not just because increased awareness of the social roots of the language enriches the thematic depth of the fiction and reveals more about the prairie, but also because it shows that the environmental forces at work in this region have many things in common with environmental forces elsewhere.

Vanderhaeghe's mode and language styles do have a lot in common with other "regional" fictions like that of Richler, Munro, Richards, Ross, and even Joyce's *Dubliners*. The term "regional" applies to all of these equally, because turn of the century Dublin, St. Urbain Street, and Munro's Hanratty are all as regional as Richards's Miramachi or Ross's prairie towns in the sense that politically created boundaries and even natural geographic boundaries do not always define regionalism as effectively as the social geographic boundaries (possibly coinciding with certain physical geographic delineations). The societies in all five of the regional fictions mentioned are alienated from the centres of imperial or hegemonic power in social, cultural, geographic, and economic ways, which makes Saint Urbain Street as regional as the prairies of Vanderhaeghe or Mitchell despite the radical differences in their physical proximity to centres of culture or power.

Vanderhaeghe's regionalism seems to have more roots in

Ross's rather than Mitchell's vision of prairie life, mainly because Ross and Vanderhaeghe employ similar modes and narrative strategies that have been common in ironic mode fiction at least as far back as Chekhov and early naturalism. A major narrative strategy involves ironic distancing between the implied author and the narrative voice, with unreliable first person narrators or third person fallible filters. The narrative focalizer or filter is often a victim of environmental forces that he or she either does not understand or can not control.

Yet, while Vanderhaeghe's ironic structures remind one of the purest naturalism, the simplicity in mode belies a complexity of insight. The ideology guiding his fiction seems more complex in many ways than the basic environmental determinism of Chekhov or even of *Dubliners*. His characters are often more aware of their environmental influences and failures than are Chekhov's and Joyces's protagonists, and often struggle with some limited choice and some insight into their limitations. The environmental factors that victimize them are not usually overly simplified for the reader as appears to be the case in some naturalism, and the characters' struggles against the socioeconomic and cultural conditioning often attain a certain integrity. One cares about these characters despite their frequently anti-social behaviour.

Beyond these narrative strategies, his humour makes his writing distinctive in a class with Richler, Hodgins, Roth,

and Heller. He has a rare ability to make us smile at perversity, or appreciate the necessities of self-deception. He leads us into a grim chuckling complicity with humanity's "fallen" nature and with his characters' regular and realistic compromises of virtue and ideals. Idyllic notions are presented only occasionally, and then usually for the purposes of characterization as either coping mechanisms or as delusions fostered by a charcter's cultural conditioning, but they do not normally play a major role in the structure, the mode, or the central conflicts, as in the fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, and Macleod.

Nevertheless, Vanderhaeghe seems aware of the gap between our myths and idyllic impulses on one side and our ordinary compromised lives on the other. Lewis Thomas addressed this gap in a paper delivered at the "Crossing Frontiers" conference on American and Canadian Western Literature (Banff 1978) when he asked this pivotal question:

> Do the discomforts of living in a society that suffers from a widespread delusion about its nature affect the way in which that society's denizens write about its experience? (59)

As a historian, he is addressing the realities of elitist and colonial Western Canadian social structures as related to settlement patterns and juxtaposing these to the following myth:

> the stereotype of western Canadian development that portrays it as wholly the work of the sturdy homesteader drawn from the ranks of the needy and oppressed of the world, who created, by heroic toil and suffering, an egalitarian, classless, and

unstructured society. (66)

This tension between "the perception of a society and its realities" (Thomas 59) is of course the central subject of this thesis; the tension certainly does affect the fiction of this region and while Vanderhaeghe does not directly juxtapose such myth against the social realities, he does this indirectly by giving us iconoclastic characters like a rural grandmother who hates the farm animals and prides herself on hard-nosed, red-neck, intolerant practicality, believing that signs of maternal nurture would be marks of weakness ("The Watcher"), or a small-town prairie teacher who breaks a young student's jaw for mocking the idyllic poetry of the English literary canon, and who seems to think that England's new multicultural reality might be spoiling his idyllic version of "England's green and pleasant land" (*Man* 151-2).

So although he does not usually mention the local prairie idyllic impulses, his narrative voices often ironically reveal the pain and alienation caused by the gaps between the myths and the reality. Much of his humour and socio-psychological insight is accomplished by an uncanny ability to educate the reader indirectly to the social class, the social attitudes, and the resulting psychological quirks of the characters through basically mimetic narrative voices and dialogue. Thus, his method of delivering a sense of place is different from the dialectical mode of Mitchell or MacLeod, but it is none the less effective in its more common ironic mode due to

thoroughly dialogized voices that reflect the socioeconomic and cultural milieu, and this he has in common with MacLeod and his variant mode of dialectical realism.

CRITICAL RESPONSE TO VANDERHAEGHE'S FICTION

For readers not as familiar with Vanderhaeghe's writing career, a brief review of the critical response to his fiction might help to corroborate some of the general aesthetic judgements suggested in the last few paragraphs. In the late seventies and early eighties Vanderhaeghe's fiction began to appear in Canadian journals and literary magazines. In 1980 he won *Canadian Fiction Magazine*'s annual award for short fiction with "The Watcher." In 1982 his first published collection of short fiction, *Man Descending*, won the Governor General's Award in Canada and the Faber Memorial Prize in Britain. In reviewing this collection for Canadian Book Review Annual, Gordon Moyles predicts that Vanderhaeghe "will one day be as good and perhaps as well known as Alice Munro" (215). In 1983 the short story "Reunion" was included in *Best American Short Stories*. His second collection, *The Trouble With Heroes and Other Stories*, was published by the smaller Borealis Press in Ottawa in 1983 to perhaps lesser critical attention, partially due to its limited availability. *My Present Age*, his first novel, was published in 1984 to strong reviews in Canada with some dissenting voices like Michael Thorpe in *Canadian Forum* (35). The novel was nominated for

the Booker Prize in England and was well received in America, Britain, and continental Europe; his books have been translated into several European languages and writers like Davies, Richler, and Munro offer warm praise for his work.

The first major critical article on his fiction was "Violence and Narrative Metalepsis in Guy Vanderhaeghe's Fiction" by Tom Gerry in 1987. Gerry mainly concentrates on narrative strategies in Vanderhaeghe's first novel, but he also persuasively refutes Thorpe's criticism of *My Present Age* that the protagonist is merely an inflated version of the narrator of the final two stories of *Man Descending* with no possibilities for character development (Gerry 199). Gerry's discussion of Vanderhaeghe's narrative strategies is helpful and I review it in my discussion on *Man Descending*.

His second novel, *Homesick*, was published to mixed reviews in 1989, though it was a co-winner of the annual City of Toronto Book Award. Then in 1992 his third collection of short stories, *Things As They Are*, seemed to vindicate the extremely positive critical responses to *Man Descending* and to *My Present Age*. Almost all of the reviewers considered a majority of these stories to be of the quality of those in *Man Descending*, and there seems to be a consensus that the title story is exceptionally strong. Charles Forceville, who teaches Canadian Literature at the Vrije Universeteit Amsterdam and reviews British and Canadian literature for the Dutch newspaper, *Trouw*, speculates that "Things As They Are?"

might be a signal,

> that Vanderhaeghe may be moving toward more intricate varieties of realism than those he has hitherto explored. But even as it is, Vanderhaeghe's new collection reveals its author's exceptional command of the art of story telling. (31)

Forceville's comment on the possible new directions of Vanderhaeghe's fiction is prompted by the thematic development of the title story, which suggests that Chekhovian inspired transparency and objectivity in naturalistic fiction might not be entirely fair to the complexity of human experiences like disillusionment and emotional survival. I have already discussed how his fiction often moves beyond the ideological bounds of traditional naturalism, and some of these stories from *Things as They Are?* would seem to indicate his continued commitment to ideological exploration and his rejection of simplistic formulas, be they thematic or stylistic.

So this study examines some of his most critically acclaimed fiction primarily in *Man Descending* and *My Present Age*, as well as some ideologically challenging stories from *Things as They Are?* and *The Trouble With Heroes*. I try to establish why Vanderhaeghe has gained an international reputation as a writer to be watched, and why his sense of place is as compelling as Mitchell's or MacLeod's despite the differences in mode.

VOICES FROM THE PLACE OF MAN'S DESCENT

Man Descending, for the most part, features protagonists

that have already descended a long way. Narrative strategies here do not include reflections on the idyllic qualities of prairie life or community ideals. The author normally distances the narrative voice with a good deal of irony, whether the voice is the delightful and unreliable first person narrator of "Drummer" and "Cages," or whether the voice is funnelled through the thoughts of the fallible third person filters in "Reunion." Again, analysis of the kinds and degrees of distancing help the reader to understand the protagonists' conflicts and struggles to cope with the psychological damage from dysfunctional families and decidedly unnurturing societies.

The opening story, "The Watcher," has some similarities to MacLeod's initial story of his first collection. They both engage young impressionable first person narrators, and in each case a young boy resorts to cruelty to farm yard poultry as a result of adult behaviour that is insensitive to his vulnerable psychological development. Where MacLeod's "In the Fall" features a family struggling against poverty, Vanderhaeghe's adult characters in "The Watcher" all manage to have enough character flaws and insensitivity to support dysfunctional behaviour as a kind of heritage passed on from generation to generation. This dark view of the adult world is reminiscent thematically of *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, but the language of the dialogue and of the narrative voice is more convincing in this story.

The narrative voice is first person unreliable, and begins with the central character's more mature reflections on his family and a particular summer on his grandmother's farm when he was eleven. The diction of the voice at the beginning of the story shows the intelligence of an adult analysis but some of the cynical immaturity of an alienated youth. For example, the narrator describes his father as follows:

> Unlike his mother, my grandma Bradley, he hadn't a scrap of flint or hard-headed common sense in him. . . . It was like the old girl had unflinchingly withheld the genetic code for responsibility and practicality from her pinheaded offspring. (3)

From the characterization of his mother and grandmother, one senses their jaded, pain-hardened language coming through the son's voice. The physical and psychological violence of the relationship between the grandmother, her daughter (the narrator's aunt), and the daughter's lover is witnessed and assimilated by "the watcher," the eleven year old narrator, Charlie. By the time this alienated, rejected, and thoroughly disturbed young man is called upon to settle the all out war between Grandma Bradley and the manipulative academic lover, he simply chooses the side which has the most power; whether that be the power to hurt or the power to protect has become irrelevant and significantly blurred.

By the end of the story the cognitive centre of the narrative voice, along with a good deal of the diction, has shifted to the eleven year old focalizer from the older narrative consciousness. The narrative voice avoids an adult

analysis and stays with the reported feelings and limited analysis of the eleven year old in this passage from the climax:

> he [the lover] was helpless now. But he insisted on fighting back and hurting the rest of us. The weak ones like Evelyn and me.
>
> I thought of Stanley the rooster and how it had felt when the tendons separated, the gristle parted and the bones crunched under my twisting hands.
>
> . . . He didn't understand much. He had forced me into the game, and now that I was a player and no longer a watcher he didn't like it. The thing was that I was good at the game. But he, being a loser, couldn't appreciate that. (36)

The author depends on the ironic distance rather than adult analysis to lead the reader to a well worn but well developed epiphany about the effects on children of the power "game" at its dirtiest. Though the theme and the technique are not new, one feels that the development of both are in a journeyman's hand.

This is a particularly successful narrative formula for Vanderhaeghe, where a young protagonist (usually the fallible narrative filter) is a victim of family and social neglect and abuse. Some stories that follow this narrative strategy are "How the Story Ends," "Drummer," and "Cages" from this collection; "Loneliness Has Its Claims," "Ray," and "New Houses" are examples of the pattern in *Things As They Are?*, his latest collection. "New Houses," of these mentioned, seems the most formulaic, while the others are strong, original ironic mode stories that give the reader fresh and uncompromisingly realistic insights into growing up in working

class Saskatchewan.

The stories, "Drummer" and "Cages," share some of the same characters: Billy (the teen-aged narrator), and Gene, his athletic, callous, and aggressive older brother, as well as a father whose mind-dulling job at the mine cuts him off from any healthy relationships with his family. The language of the narrative voice is a humorous recreation of the vintage working-class vernacular of high school males in small town Saskatchewan of the sixties. The sense of place discovered through this dialogized language reflects the social geography of that time and place, including the following: the social privileging of the unfettered male ego and male performance at work and at leisure; the learned and systemic dehumanization of women as reflected in dating mores and in the inhibition of feminine self-esteem; the entrenched social and ideological divisions between the two basic denominations of "wet" and "dry" (not to mention the gap between Catholics and Protestants which was much greater in the fifties and sixties in rural Saskatchewan than it is today); and the common sanction of male violence as part of normal social development.

The narrative voice invokes the oral, anecdotal vernacular of a pool-room, a prairie pub, or a high school cafeteria. The narratee seems to be a listener in such a setting as opposed to an implied reader of a short story. "Drummer" begins with the line, "You'd think my old man was

the Pope's nephew or something if you'd seen how wild he went when he learned I'd been sneaking off Sundays to Faith Baptist Church" (81). His colourful ability to exaggerate any given description adds to the tone of adolescent extemporaneous anecdotal speech aimed at a listener rather than a reader. For example the narrator compares the dress of Nancy, a beautiful straight-laced Baptist girl, to "the same kind of shiny material my mother wanted for drapes" (89) but his father had vetoed the cloth as too heavy for the curtain rods. Nancy, on a double date with Gene (the narrator's brother), is very embarrassed by the dress, because she feels that her mother has made it for her as a kind of armour. The following passage exemplifies the narrator's hyperbolic style as he describes the armour's maiden trial in the back seat of the car:

> So I drove around this dump for about an hour while Gene tried to molest Nancy. She put up a fair-to-middling struggle from what I could hear. The stuff her dress was made of was so stiff it crackled when she moved. Anyway the two of them had it snapping and crackling like a bonfire there in the back seat while they fought a pitched battle over her body. She wasn't having none of that first time out of the chute. (89)

The exaggeration about the dress and the brutal ironic distance in the casual description of Gene molesting Nancy are typical of Vanderhaeghe's ability to move humour into a kind of everyday horror as he reveals the seamier side of social conditioning in small town Saskatchewan. For example, Nancy's cousin Doreen is quite accepting of her demeaning sexual role

on this date. Her response and the narrator's response to Nancy's predicament again reveal the social conditioning both by the content and by the diction:

> "Some people don't know when they're having a good time," says Doreen. I think she was a little pissed I hadn't parked and give her some action. But Lord knows what might've happened to Nancy if I'd done that. (91-2)

Vanderhaeghe uses similar narrative voice strategies in some of the stories with adult male protagonists. In "Reunion," "Man Descending," and "Sam, Soren, and Ed" one notes the same level of craftsmanship in the ironic distancing of the adult narrator or the narrative filters in the case of "Reunion." Ed's narrative voice in the final two stories is more jaded and articulate than the adolescent oral narrative voice of "Drummer." The humour is more sophisticated and one senses that the audience is to be construed as an implied reader rather than as a listening narratee. However, the individual differences are less striking than the similarities in the thematic power brought about by the ironic distancing and by the exploration of the demeaning, character-immolating, and relationship-destroying consequences of unemployment, poverty, and social callousness.

In "Sam, Soren, and Ed," the final story of the collection, the narrator is the same protagonist who describes himself as a "man descending" in the title story. The author delivers a more complicated narrative strategy, here, with an intelligent and self-conscious narrative voice that is

nevertheless distanced ironically from the author and reader. Because of Ed's intelligence, his relatively developed self-knowledge, and his tendency towards a mixture of defensive and confessional tones, the reader trusts many of his observations about himself and other characters. But he is also unreliable in the sense that we are always aware of his defensive attitude about his anti-social behaviour and his lack of discipline; also, the reader is expected to be even more conscious than Ed of the related psychological, social, and economic factors influencing his self-esteem and motivation. Although he might not be terribly likeable as a person, as a character Ed reveals to the reader his struggles with weight, self-image, rejection, and unemployment. Thus, Vanderhaeghe increases our cognitive empathy against the emotional distance built up by his behaviour and self-deception. So the contrast between our emotional and our cognitive distances from the narrative voice creates a more complex voice and protagonist than those in "Drummer," or in Joyce's "Counterparts." The irony is a more subtle combination of the narrator's own self-indicting and self-deprecating wit, which decreases the emotional distance, added to the ironic complexity due to our loathing of Ed's behaviour on one hand and our behavioral understanding on the other. This enigmatic reaction to the character is well primed and controlled by the author through the narrative voice.

The Sam of the title is Sam Waters, Ed's hero of the Wild

Western romance that he writes as a kind of escapist therapy for articulating his ideals of decisiveness and courage. The Soren of the title is Soren Kierkegaard, the existentialist inspiration for Ed's motivational turnaround, after his ex-wife obliges his request for a "test" of his goodwill by challenging him to train for and finish a twelve and a half mile marathon. One notes some of the more obvious irony in the following passage where Ed is just slowing to a walk after his first few strides of jogging:

> It is a stupid way to prove a point. Twelve and a half miles? She has misunderstood me. That wasn't what I was talking about. It was love I was speaking of and in a moment of poetic rhapsody she bound me with mundane specificities. Love is never having to run twelve and a half miles. Love is offering to. But only a piker accepts. (225)

One of Vanderhaeghe's only uses for idyllic impulses in his fiction is revealed by the role of the Sam Waters romance as a coping mechanism in Ed's struggle against his own lack of decisiveness and courage. For example, in the following passage Ed is jogging again, and for motivation he imagines a scene from his duster in which Sam is heroically escaping the Shoshone Indians in a test of endurance:

> A couple of kids . . . follow me . . . giggling and chanting, "Go man, Go!" like onlookers urging on a ledge jumper. . . . But I disappoint them. In fact at the very moment Sam is clawing his way out of the river, shivering, retching and coughing, miles upstream and safe from his howling captors I am fitting my key in my lock, coughing and retching. I have gone a considerable way my first time out. Perhaps as far as a mile. (228)

Vanderhaeghe attempts to show some limited emotional recovery

and some signs of the existentialist's free will in Ed by suggesting that he is moving from his "yardstick" (222) of the "unchanging and solid" Sam Waters, to the more substantial and mature ideology of Kierkegaard. Near the climax of the narrative, after landing a job selling china in Eatons, Ed boasts, "No, it's Soren whom I contemplate as I fondle a piece of Doulton and make ecstatic faces across the counter at some dame who is starting a daughter-in-law off as a collector" (229). Although he hopes that the chosen epigraph for his new Western novel (an inspiring quote by Soren Kierkegaard about the gap between one's understanding and one's will power) might impress his ex-wife, the reader is left with a good deal of earned scepticism as to Ed's ability to match action to the quote. However, we admire his struggle, his defensive humour, and his halting exercise of limited choice.

Thus two important ideological directions apparent in this closing story appear to be part of the larger philosophic foundations reflected in this collection and in his later fiction. The first has to do with naturalism, environmental determinism, and the possibility of free will. Several of Doris Hillis's questions to Vanderhaeghe in an interview in *Voices and Vision* pursue the issue as to whether his male protagonists are powerless and "unable to cope with life" (24) due to the environmental forces that are shaping them. Vanderhaeghe claims that although his characters are often

"overcome by feelings of powerlessness" (29), this would be an oversimplification of his fiction, because there are characters in these stories as in life who exercise limited free will, or who succeed or fail for mysterious or very complex reasons and these are the causes and cases he often explores (29-30). This careful exploration no doubt accounts for the amount of empathy he kindles in his readers for characters who are ironically distanced and often superficially unpleasant.

The second noticeable ideological direction in the final story and in the collection has to do with his use of the Sam Waters romance and the accompanying Western idyllic impulses. Whereas Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod seriously examine the idyllic notions of the society or region of their settings, juxtaposing them with the claims of mimetic realism to test their utility or their degree of naivety as social values, Vanderhaeghe, as a rule, only uses the idyllic as an indication of the failure of his characters to handle the reality of their social or psychological situation. At least three other stories in this collection suggest the similar use of idyllic impulse, and in all cases the result is quite effective, but for very different reasons than the ones noted in the fiction of these other three writers. One senses an assumption in Vanderhaeghe's fiction that any idyllic or pastoral impulse is suspect by definition; if that is an accurate inference, it should be explored, since it likely

reflects a broadly held attitude among authors and critics of prairie and Atlantic realism, and perhaps among Canadian authors and critics in general.

IDYLLIC IMPULSES AS COPING MECHANISMS

Three consecutive stories in the second half of *Man Descending*, "Going to Russia," "A Taste for Perfection," and "The Expatriates Party," all feature protagonists and major characters who turn to the idyllic to cope with death, aging, and destruction of human potential. But these are not the idyllic impulses springing from the regional landscape or from the indigenous communities; in two of the stories the idyllic notions spring from literature foreign to the characters' milieu and in "A Taste for Perfection" the protagonist borrows idylls and fantasies of other characters in the terminal ward in order to cope with imminent death.

In "The Expatriates Party" the first person narrator is a burned-out high school Literature teacher who has not yet come to terms with the death of his wife. After breaking a student's jaw in frustration he heads for an early retirement visit to "England's green and pleasant land" (151). He pines for the sort of idyllic feelings that he experiences vicariously from Tennyson and other pastoral passages of English poetry. Naturally, faced with contemporary London and his son's younger less experienced friends, he wonders "where [are] the healing waters?" (159). In his alcoholism and

bitterness, he faces, in the following passages, the central disillusioning question that many Vanderhaeghe protagonists must face, as to whether the idyllic impulses can lead to any permanent healing or mitigation of the real social and psychological problems:

> Was he a breaker of jaws? A drunkard who kicked at strangers . . . ?
>
> Or was he the man who had dreamed of water, who had sat quietly on a stretch of ashy-grey sand and watched a gently tugging line, huddled with his wife?
>
> . . . Why had the light been so brief? And why was the trick so hard, the trick every expatriate and every conquered people had to learn to survive?
>
> Je me souviens, he said. Je me souviens. (170)

The question Joe faces in this story is one of identity and individuation. Is "the trick" of idealizing memory necessary to sanity in some cases, or is alienation and humiliation something that needs to be remembered as it is? A similar question arises for Mr. Caragan, first person narrator of "Going to Russia." He has a retarded daughter in the asylum whom his wife will not visit, and a psychiatrist who dehumanizes him. As his public behaviour becomes more bizarre in protest of the emotional struggles and callousness of those closest to him, he dreams of exile in Russia:

> Not Soviet Russia. But nineteenth-century Russia, the Russia of Dostoevsky's saintly prostitutes and Alyosha; of Tolstoy's Pierre; and Askionov, the sufferer in "God Sees The Truth But Waits". A country where the characters in books were allowed to ask one another the questions: How must I live to be happy? What is goodness? Why do men suffer? What is to be done? (125)

He eventually is committed to the asylum with his personal

library of nineteenth-century Russian authors, and that world becomes the sufferer's idyll for him, because people of his own century will not engage in those ancient metaphysical questions which hold for him a kind of catharsis. The narrator closes the story content to share asylum with his daughter of whom he says, "whenever I look into her wise, calm eyes set like stones in their Asiatic folds, I sense the grandeur of Russia, the infinite, colossal steppes sleeping there" (128). In both of these stories the protagonists cope with their emotional pain by escaping to idealized literary worlds. These stories are the beginnings of a pattern in Vanderhaeghe's fiction that presents idyll, when it is presented at all, as something usually derived from literature rather than landscape.

The exception might seem to come in "A Taste for Perfection," which is one of the most grim stories from a writer who regularly educates his readers in the appreciation of grim realism. Here, the idyllic impulses are part of the heritage of David, a Jewish orderly, working in the terminal ward of a large prairie hospital. But even his vision of the "Promised Land" comes more from literature than it does from history. David is the only breath of hope both in the ward and in this fiction, and that hope is rather tentative. The narrative voice here is also exceptional in that Vanderhaeghe uses a rare omniscient narrative voice occasionally to describe David, whereas the majority of the narrative voice is

limited omniscient and filtered through the dying protagonist. The narrative agent characterizes David as follows:

> and now, marooned in the midst of the prairies, he yearned for the ancient sun-baked stones of Jerusalem, the oranges of Jaffa, the lithe and saucy sabras packing fire arms.
> . . . People speculated that he sensed that the reality could never equal the bounty, the splendour, the milk and honey of the land of Canaan that he imagined. Better to be here, dreaming, than there, disillusioned. (130)

That is probably as overt a statement on the role of idyll in Vanderhaeghe's fiction as one is likely to find in these stories. Here again, idyllic impulses do not form part of a structural dialectic between idyll and realism as in some of the fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, or MacLeod. Not only are they not as prominent as a structural feature; the idyllic impulses are not as deliberately explored to discover any positive values alongside the more obvious naiveties.

In this story, David uses his idyllic "Canaan" as a kind of therapeutic diversion for the protagonist who is not coming to terms gracefully with his dawning knowledge of death's imminence. As the protagonist is forced into the "revelatory perception" that "everyone was a terminal case" (147) and that there "was no escaping this ward" (147), he does manage to move emotionally beyond his own tragedy to embrace the communal tragedy of the ward, and by extension, the greater terminal ward of all humanity. The protagonist finally allows himself to embrace the fantasy world of a dying lady who thinks she recognizes him as her lost husband; this is a

fantasy that had repelled him earlier. In their symbolic embrace, she invites him to her idyllic picnic, the "perfect end to a perfect day" (148).

Vanderhaeghe leaves the ending deliberately ambiguous as to whether the protagonist's surrender to this fantasy is due to a newly forged compassion, or due to an emotional breakdown caused by the power of his broader revelation that no one escapes alive from the "terminal" ward (symbolic of our human bondage to mortality). Possibly, his surrender is due to both revelation and a resulting compassion. One senses that these attitudes toward the idyllic are typical in his fiction, that sometimes the idyllic is condoned as, or at least recognized as, an inevitable coping mechanism, while some idyllic impulses seem to be presented as a weak retreat to an even more dangerous escapism. These reactions are probably the most common approaches to the idyllic among those Canadian writers of naturalistic realism proficient at evoking the regional social and economic milieu, but who are less likely to draw on the larger cultural myths or the regional myths for their structure and imagery. Such writers include Richler, Ross, Munro, and Richards, among others.

OUR TROUBLES WITH HEROES

There are three stories in Vanderhaeghe's collection, *The Trouble With Heroes*, that are of specific interest to this thesis because of their mixture of modes or sub-genres. Each

is an attempt at historical or period piece realism, but they deal with characters already mythologized in our literature. Thus the form, the setting, and the characters virtually demand a confrontation with the idyllic notions from our society's mythologies. For example, the resurrected Lazarus of the gospels is projected into historical realism, in "Lazarus," as Vanderhaeghe recreates an archetypal follower of the Messiah. Ironically, Lazarus's miraculous transcendence of death only leads him to doubt the value and the purpose of that miracle. This protagonist is aging as an old waiting "witness" confused by the Messiah's delay, tempted to despair by a "demon," and discredited by a generation of unbelievers. He is like the ancient mariner to the younger wedding guests, for his only wedding canopy is the solemn silence of the stars beneath which he waits with the growing horrors of his old age and *the* age. He is no doubt an archetype of the doubting believer through all ages, and thus in spite of the historical realist mode, the story becomes a modern parable on the idyllic impulses, generated by our society's dominant mythology, about death and old age.

The narrative strategy is similar in "No Man Could Bind Him," where the narrative voice belongs to the urbane Greek foster brother of Stephen, a Jewish slave purchased by the narrator's father. Stephen later becomes the Gadarene demoniac, Legion, delivered from his demons by the Messiah of the gospels. The narrator attempts to put such a romantic

deliverance into the perspective of Greek ideology, that is, objective separation of the empirical from the realm of ideas. The Greek narrator and the Jewish "brother" become archetypal representatives of rationalism and transcendental monotheism respectively. This narrative strategy again converts a story in the mode of historical realism into a modern parable about rational and empirical ideologies and their conflict with transcendental idyllic belief systems. Like "Lazarus," this story is open-ended, since the power and weaknesses of both ideologies are chronicled in a realistic mode.

The narrative ends with the irony of Stephen dying during the same Passover as did "the magician, Jesus of Nazareth" (35). After burying his "brother" among the tombs that he once haunted, the narrator observes a bird of prey soaring above him and its flight becomes a symbol of the ideological conflict between the culturally archetypal "brothers" in this description of the Hebrew by the Greek:

> From where I stood I could not detect the wind's rush through his pinions, nor fathom the force that suspended him above the grip of the earth. Nevertheless the invisible bore him up. I never approved, but finally it was the invisible which allowed my brother to fling himself into freedom and cut the bonds of pain and necessity which bind most. Perhaps it is given only to madmen. (35)

This response to the transcendental idyllic notions that grow out of the "invisible" is also found in some of his other fiction, but only "Things As They Are?" (a story written a decade later) overtly articulates the complexity of realism beyond surface appearances, although this complexity is

implied in other stories.

"Cafe Society" is the only story of the three which could be seen as specifically regional, but it has some parallel thematic thrust to "Lazarus." An exiled Gabriel Dumont is sitting in a classy cafe in Paris, where "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West Show is to perform for the Centennial Celebrations of the French Revolution. There is a beautiful touch of colonial irony as entrepreneurs of the mother culture, celebrating revolution and progress, show little appreciation for a living revolutionary, and less for idyllic-sounding tales of the Canadian Prairie.

Vanderhaeghe suggests that the ideals, and the heroes of one culture are currencies that devalue rapidly in foreign ports and with the passage of time. The "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" that Dumont fought for can not turn a profit in Paris. "Cafe Society" suggests that the centres of empire have no time to comprehend their historical and ideological relationships with the colonial backwaters. Again a mode of historical realism generates a modern parable of the relationship between the cultural centres and the regions.

This narrative strategy of blending historical realism with mythological or legendary characters is unique, in Vanderhaeghe's fiction, to these stories; however, the ideological treatment of idyll and realism in these stories is basically consistent with Vanderhaeghe's treatment of them in *Man Descending*. The two biblically related stories and

"Prodigal," also from this collection, are his only stories that use biblical or Classical motifs and mythology prominently in the structure, although his first novel, *My Present Age*, shows a broad awareness of European and American literature from Kafka to Balzac to Socrates, and from Roman history to Walter Scott to Mark Twain.

THE VANDERHAEGHE VERSION OF OUR PRESENT AGE

My Present Age is urbane ironic mode realism with immense sensitivity to the complexities of human motivation and behaviour. Vanderhaeghe carnivalizes our human foibles with a "grotesque" mode of humour, as Tom Gerry rightly observes (202), although I would argue that Ed's corpulence is not an example of "the physically grotesque elements" (Gerry 201), but an example of normal mimetic realism. The grotesque elements are centred in the narrative voice and the consciousness of Ed, the extremely intelligent and well read narrator. His expression of the grotesque in word and deed is his defense against people's pretensions, intolerance, and violence. Carnivalesque modes have a long respectable tradition in the novel, as so many Bakhtinian critics are currently pointing out. Vanderhaeghe's strategy is very different from the exaggeration, caricature, and tall tale humour of Mitchell, and he employs a tone almost entirely foreign to the work of Buckler and MacLeod.

In "Violence and Metalepsis in Guy Vanderhaeghe's

Fiction," Gerry suggests that the violence in this novel and Vanderhaeghe's other fiction links it to Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and other writers from the American South (200). The connection, though not fully explored by Gerry, is probably not the violence itself, but the documentation and revelation of the social and psychological conditions that spawn the violence.

But Gerry's major thesis in the article addresses Vanderhaeghe's alleged "predominant formal" structure of metalepsis (206). This is a narratological term meaning a shift completely out of the narrative artifice, as when Fowles's modern narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* suddenly appears in the flesh on a train in the nineteenth century before he was born. Gerry uses Sterne's narrator Shandy as an example of metalepsis; Shandy sometimes addresses the implied reader as though he expects the reader to physically participate in the scene. However, Vanderhaeghe never literally violates the narrative artifice except in the final scene of the novel (and that is arguable) where the black man in bare feet, who can not have possibly entered Ed's room in the flesh, actually addresses him. The reader suspects that this is Jim, the fleeing slave and companion of Huckleberry Finn. Ed often fantasizes escape with Huck on that idyllic raft on the Mississippi, and Gerry refers to *these* fanatasies (not metalepsis) when he writes about Vanderhaeghe "modifying metalepsis from a rhetorical device to

a method for revealing his narrator's structuring of his thoughts and actions" (206). But those excursions into fantasy never violate realism except possibly in that final scene where the surreal appearance and voice of Jim represents Ed's final reversion to escapism. Still, there is plenty of room to interpret the scene as a dream or a fantasy. In a sense, Black Jim is an alter ego of Ed, because Ed is very much a slave on the run, a slave to various psychological and social forces that he has succumbed to again after a credible fight against his bondage.

There is one other case of narrative metalepsis that prepares us for this final one, but that occurs in Ed's Western Romance novel (the same duster as in "Sam, Soren, and Ed") where Sam Waters finds out that the drunk he is talking to is Huck Finn. Of course, Ed often imagines himself to be Huck Finn and is quite capable of talking to Sam Waters and asking him for advice, especially when drinking. After all, Sam is the idyllic model of perfect manhood created by Ed's imagination and his unfortunate socialization. However, imagination is not metalepsis; it does not violate the narrative artifices of realistic fiction, but rather enhances them. Although Gerry does violence to the concept repeatedly in his article, his point is well taken that Ed's tendency to sojourn in the imaginative and fantasy realms of literature is one of Vanderhaeghe's crucial characterization techniques, especially with the Huck Finn motif.

If there is a significant use of idyllic impulse in this novel, it has to do with Ed's tendency to use these fantasies of Sam Waters or Huck Finn as idyllic escape from the complex social and psychological forces arrayed against him. Again this is not like MacLeod's systematic use of regional idyllic impulses in a structural dialectic to make a social statement or to portray a value struggle within a society. This is primarily a characterization tool to explore psychological damage within this protagonist. A good example is from a passage that describes Ed's fantasy one night in a February blizzard that parallels his emotions. The fantasy occurs as he contemplates the pain that he has inflicted on his ex-wife in a restaurant conversation where his acerbic humour cut too close to her raw emotional trauma. The passage starts with a simple imaginative metaphor, "The bed I lie on is a raft" (52). He goes on to set up a consciously idyllic passage of soothing escape from his own trauma. The following portion of that passage is crucial to interpreting the ending as well as the character development and the role of idyll:

> There are two people on this raft, the boy Huck and the man Jim. I play both parts, modulating voice and accents as required. Ed is bound for the Gulf and for the moment I know no impulses but the river's. Born on its broad, strong back through a night of huge, flaring stars an arm's length above me, and soothed by the faint music of the river's surge, I feel a great peace. (52)

This entire passage and the other Huck Finn fantasies are even more powerfully ironic than the Sam Waters passages. Ed is quite capable of explaining the psychological roots of his Sam

Waters fantasy, but when his fantasies turn toward Huck, Ed is usually no longer capable of shoring up his crippled self-esteem against the psychological storms raging between his intelligence and his anti-social behaviour.

This is a tragedy that hurts all the more because the man descending seems to be exercising some of that hidden reserve of character, which complicates the normal cognitive ironic distancing between the reader and the narrator with this element of empathy. With that exercise of character and maybe even some will-power (Ed's Achilles heel), he seems to be *ascending* from his environmentally fated fallen state, to engage "in dubious battle" on a higher plain, against the moral and psychological decay that is crippling him. But even as Huck protests and resists the attempt to "sivilize" him, so Ed finally fails to allow the shallow "civilities" of social decorum to tame his inimical tendency to speak his acerbic version of the truth at the wrong time. At the climactic moments, this man is cast down again to wallow in a frightening depression from which only the idyllic raft ride to freedom can rescue him.

The narrative strategies here are typical of the author's extreme ironic mode realism, except for the final scene, if one was to accept it as actual metalepsis. However, a reading of Twain's Jim as an extension of Ed's fantasy world seems more in keeping with the general narrative strategy, and adds to the ironic distance between the implied author and the

narrative voice. This novel has a similar ironic structure to Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are*, Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and Ross's *As For Me and My House*, in that the reader is supposed to garner an understanding of the environmental limitations on the protagonist well beyond the understanding achieved by the protagonist. However, the degree of Ed's insight, the complexity of his behaviour arising from the insight, and the carnivalization created by the tone and wit of the narrative voice set this novel apart.

THE ENIGMA OF REALISM BEYOND "THINGS AS THEY ARE"

This study will not dwell on *Homesick* to any extent, because this second novel is probably not Vanderhaeghe's strongest or most unified work, and the narrative strategies and voices do not always produce strong examples of the author's distinctive dexterity in this contemporary naturalistic mode. Hallvard Dahlie concluded his review of this novel by saying,

> Homesick ultimately is a disappointment because the techniques we have come to expect from Vanderhaeghe--irony, understatement, sensitive language, credible characterization--are not sufficiently exploited here. (185)

Although this dismissal is a bit harsh and overly generalized, some evidence from the narrative voices supports such opinion. Because none of the narrative voice filters have the insight and flare of an Ed, the narrative strategy depends entirely on the ironic distance between the reader and the characters.

Consequently, we notice a lack of the "sensitive language" of the first novel due to the author's concessions to the limited eloquence and cognizance of his filters. The characterization by narrative filters sometimes lacks the driving credibility of his best fiction; for example, in chapter two of the novel the narrative voice shifts from third-person filtered to the first-person thoughts of Vera (16). The next nine-page discourse is not quite credible as a continuous thought pattern. The voice in its separate articulations is believable, but as a unit it sounds like an excuse for the heavy hand of the author to condense some important characterization and character history into our first introduction to the character.

However, after some labouring of the characterization in the first half of the novel, Vanderhaeghe's narrative energy begins to burn brighter. The narrative voices do develop a small-town prairie sense of place in a conventional mode, as the blind alleys of the conflicts between father and daughter, mother and son, and grandfather and son all become rather compelling. The major characters carry their limitations and personal blindness through to their individual tragic and ironic ends. The final scene of Vera battling the "cold" of death in her father's dying moments (292) is archetypal of humanity's often futile but moving struggles with relationships and death.

Scenes of this intensity are common in Vanderhaeghe's

latest collection of short stories. Daniel Woolford says, in a relatively thorough review,

> At their best, the stories in *Things as They Are?* reverberate with archetypal significance . . . a delicious sense of enigma, the feeling that you've discovered something important without knowing precisely what. (40)

The first four stories and the last two represent Vanderhaeghe at his best; the others, "New Houses," "Teacher," "Fraud," and "Home Place," are well crafted stories, but that "sense of enigma" is not as strong. The ironic distance from the narrative voice clearly and almost clinically delivers us the message. In these, as in most of the stories, there are what Woolford calls "psychological delvings into those moments of childhood and adolescence that leave a permanent mark, that explain why the boy is the father to the man" (40), but the best stories here do not always offer us such clear causality and the pat judgements from our superior ironic distance. A few of them beguile the reader into a more subjective and empathetic relationship to the protagonists in spite of the irony. Counted among the enigmatic stories are "Things As They Are?," "Loneliness Has Its Claims," "Ray," and probably "Master of Disaster."

"Master of Disaster," in the tradition of "Drummer" and "Cages," has a youthful narrator growing up in small-town Saskatchewan with few positive environmental influences and too many disturbed peers to arrive at maturity with what one could comfortably call normalcy. The peer group leader, here,

has a Hollywood induced flair for acting and directing the role of the macho romantic hero. The narrator, while aware of the leader's control over his peers, does not have the resources to develop his own identity. The narrator describes Kurt, the central victim, as "big and slow and solid" (*Things* 60), while Kurt's own actions and words reveal his low self-esteem. The leader, Norman, preys on the poor self-images of others, and thus he convinces Kurt that he can make him into a prize fighter.

The author insures that the unreliable narrator is not quite aware of the horror he describes in the final fight scene, especially the horror of Norman's tyrannical and bullying mind control over fighter and peers. The "victory" of this archetypal despot in using other people to indulge his own demagogic fantasies is highlighted by the narrator's lack of understanding as to why Kurt (the victim of social and personal gullibility) withdraws socially from his peers. The following description of the changes in Kurt is typical of the ironic distance between our understanding and that of the narrative voice in this kind of mode:

> There were other changes. His hair grew longer. He quit the football team. . . . He began to hang around with strange types, two or three assholes who had published poems in the yearbook about Vietnam and babies crying in Watts. (83)

The double irony of the ending helps to give this story its enigma. Not only does the narrator not understand the victim's responses, but also the reader realizes that Kurt's

final act of leaving school and the community might be for him the only means of escaping the tyranny and violence inherent in the value system and the ideals of his community.

One also notices the language of both the narrator and the antagonist, Norman, reflecting the socioeconomic class, the cultural deprivation, and the small town peer group control of values as has been observed in "Drummer." In the following passage Norman is, as usual, recreating one of his real life disciples into a larger-than-life movie character: "Fucking Dooey . . . nothing the guy can't lift. Dooey could steal Christ off the cross and not disturb the nails. Couldn't you Dooey? Fucking right" (57).

Thus, through their actions and their language the antagonist and the narrator are both revealed as victims with little chance for escape from the tawdry imported ideals of "Cool Hand Luke" and the other macho heroes of the silver screen, nor from the poverty of their socioeconomic heritage. Woolford comments on the "tyranny" theme, saying, "Here too the political significance, though metaphorical rather than overt, is unmistakeable" (41). He might have used "metonymical" rather than "metaphorical," but his points about the "archetypal" and "political" significance are undeniable. The litany of violent and naively romantic American movies and Norman's mad charismatic despotism (inherited from Hollywood) reflect some real cross border influences on prairie youth.

This theme of the social and psychological deprivation

reflected in many working class sections of prairie society is found, in some measure, in most of Vanderhaeghe's stories. The most intriguing ones often include a compassionate sense of the victim's struggling humanity. For example, in "Ray," the ironic distance between author and narrative filter allows the reader to understand not only "that something had been askew in [Ray's] childhood" (87), but also that his wife can see the psychologically impairing mote in her spouse's eye but not the beam in her own. Ray's alcoholic, emotionally stunted father and the resulting impact on Ray's ability to communicate emotions are both held over his head by a wife who comes out of a higher social class and has more access to some basic knowledge of behavioral sciences, which the reader is expected to have before reading such ironic mode fiction. So when the author makes the reader question her weapon-like use of such knowledge, and when Ray starts to recognize the falseness of his wife's own self-knowledge, the theme almost subversively takes on a metafictional dimension reminding the reader to look for the environmentally deterministic mote in one's own eye, in spite of one's comfortable ironic distance from fictional victims like Ray.

A similar sensitivity to the humanity of the victim and "villain" alike is found in "Loneliness Has Its Claims." The narrator, Charlie, and his Grandma Bradley are major characters already developed in "The Watcher" from *Man Descending*. As suggested previously, Grandma Bradley is

something of an iconoclastic type compared to the idyllic model of a nurturing prairie matriarch; she is very believable. The idyllic version of the nurturing farm seems conspicuously absent as well, as Charlie's comments reveal:

> Under normal circumstances I would have considered going for a drive with a man like Mr. Foster a horrible ordeal. But things being relative, it beat the hell out of another afternoon spent watching a cooking show and "Take Thirty" on C.B.C. (*Things* 190)

"Uncle Cecil" Foster turns out to have latent pedophilic tendencies mixed with a genuine need for friendship or a mentor-to-youth relationship. Such complicated confusing relationships never seemed to disturb the more idyllic world of *Jake and the Kid*.

But one never senses that Vanderhaeghe is trying for the shock value of the latest *expose* limits of realism, perhaps because he insists on complicating our sense of justice by characterizing a rounded pedophile as well as a rounded victim. There is no latent defence here of "Uncle" Cecil's behaviour, but a complex and compassionate look at a broader spectrum of the alienated in a fallen society that fosters both homophobia and the justifications for the .22 calibre rifle as a plaything for boys to destroy any wild thing that moves or flies. Woolford refers to Charlie's gift rifle as "the fourth player in the drama" (41) and says that Vanderhaeghe "is careful to treat this `character' [the gun] with the respect it deserves" (41). Once again, there are these two elements that go such a long way to make this one of

his strongest stories: the ironic distance from Charlie's profoundly disturbed narrative voice, plus Vanderhaeghe's ability to make the reader care enough about these characters to examine more profoundly the relationships between their psychological struggles and the prairie social milieu. We are also required to reevaluate our stereotypes and idyllic simplifications of "things as they are" on the prairies.

All of the reviewers seem to agree that "Things As They Are?" is the strongest story of the book, even though the ambiguity of the title remains strong throughout its thematic development. The narrative voice is a third person fallible filter with some objective and ironic distance between the author and the narrative focalizer, except that the opening paragraph comes from a narrative agent hardly distanced at all from the implied author. The paragraph is a series of six sentence fragments like stage directions for a drama script setting the scene and the mood:

> A monastery surrounded by fields of lush grain, girdled by dark pines. Iron bells ringing the morning stars out of the skies and the black crows into them. A dusty road at noon, butterflies in the ditches folding brown and yellow wings on purple-headed thistles, stooped monks pulling weed in a distant garden. A young man greatly afflicted in body but ardent to serve God. A setting and a character for a nineteenth-century story, most probably Russian. Last of all, a writer. (217)

The passage's salient features signal some unique elements in this story: the consciously idyllic description, the connection of idyll with religion, and the connection of the metaphysical questions surrounding idyll and religion with the

writings of nineteenth-century Russia. These three elements come from a writer who has religiously eschewed the idyllic, except perhaps in mimetic presentation of idyllic fantasy used by his characters as a coping mechanism or as a dangerous escape from reality.

Nevertheless, this is a classic twentieth-century story even though at the end, Jack Greer, the protagonist and a failing writer at his personal crossroads, is about to begin his redemptive path by writing a "nineteenth-century kind of story" (249) about the very characters we have been reading about, as outlined in the opening sketch. There are other elements of metafiction in his parallels to the conflicting nineteenth-century styles: the contrast between Chekhovian naturalism and Tolstoy's or Dostoevsky's more metaphysical concerns parallels the contrast between Greer's preferred Chekhovian objectivity and the story he is about to write, which we understand must go beyond "things as they are" or at least beyond "things as they appear."

One can not help noting another metafictional level of reference to Vanderhaeghe's own predilection for "the famous objectivity, the pitiless refusal to delude oneself, to see clearly and not lose heart" (*Things* 226). Thus, one has to sit up and take notice when Vanderhaeghe's third person narrative voice describes a scene with the following transcendental imagery:

> he saw the church appear on the horizon, a white structure set upon an unexpected knoll. . . . As he

> drew near, as the ground rose, tilting his angle of vision upward, the church grew brighter in the strange, beguiling light, more and more luminous against the setting of dark, restless, changeable sky. (231)

The reader recovers somewhat when the scene inside takes on a Bergman like horror from the art, the odour, and the little girl's corpse in the coffin, which startles Greer into fleeing. Then his confrontation with the coal black dog, just before his black out, suggests that this might indeed be the old Vanderhaeghe ideology, but stylistically the surrealism juxtaposed with the transcendental imagery is a mode not seen in his writing, except perhaps for some passing similarities in "Lazarus" one of his earliest stories.

What prepares us for this seminal scene is the basic conflict between the hard-nosed realist ideology of Jack Greer (who retreats to this monastery to dry out and to confront a monumental writer's block) and the apparently religious devotion of Roland Madox, a grotesque burn victim and aspirant to the monastic order. Although Roland is not quite the devotee that he appears to be (the abbot contends that he is a fraud and a con artist) Greer learns enough about the man's spirit and imagination to realize that the reality of Roland's identity is much more complex than either Roland's version or the Abbot's. After Roland's expulsion from the monastery, the mutual alienation of Greer and Madox from society kindles a kind of communion through rebellious assertion of their human dignity in a classy restaurant from which they are expelled in

a hilarious and climactic scene. Despite their dialectically opposite philosophies of life, they part company having struck a lasting comradeship. Roland is in "reckless pursuit of his destiny" (247)--religious orders and the priesthood, which is clearly a "headlong rush against the odds" (247) that exhilarates and inspires Jack Greer to break his writer's block.

The thematic import becomes a bit clearer as one realizes that Greer no longer can accept, with confident, dogmatic objectivity, a simple version of "things as they are"--not after his surreal experience with the church and the black dog, and not after his new knowledge of Roland's complexity and their seemingly "kindred spirits" despite their opposed world views. His memory of Chekhov's anomalous story, "The Black Monk," a tale about the power of illusion and inspiration juxtaposed against reality, further adds to his revelation about the qualifications needed in his formerly simplistic philosophy of "things as they are."

A SUMMARY OF THE COUNTERPOINT

One needs to be cautious before speculating that this last theme reflects any movement in Vanderhaeghe's ideology or aesthetics. It might be safe to conclude that the narrative style and structure of this story introduce "more intricate varieties of realism than those he has hitherto explored" (Forceville 31), but the illusion of transparent appearances

is something that he has pursued in many of his strongest stories. This questioning of the transparency of "things as they are" stamps his best fiction as enigmatic realism that tries to reach beyond the clear-sighted mimesis of the more naturalistic contemporary realists, like Nowlan and Richards, into realms of metaphysics and socio-psychological insight reminiscent of Dostoevsky's best fiction, but in a definitely twentieth-century mode.

Vanderhaeghe's preferred modes are far from the mode of dialectic realism sometimes employed by Mitchell, Buckler, and Macleod, as far perhaps as Chekhov's mode is from those of Tolstoy, Turgenov, and Dostoevsky. Vanderhaeghe's sensitive and sometimes complex ironic modes are firmly in the family of Ross, Richler, Munro, Birdsell, and Richards. His intelligence and craft bode well for his own future fiction and for the continued development of innovative contemporary ironic modes descending from turn-of-the-century naturalism.

Where the dialectical realism of MacLeod and Mitchell often juxtaposes the regional idyllic impulses with mimetic realism in order to explore the relationship of their regions' values, ideals, and mythologies to the socioeconomic and cultural reality, Vanderhaeghe evokes a similarly intense social and cultural sense of place mainly through the language of his dialogue and narrative voices (a strategy that the other three writers also use). One interesting result of Vanderhaeghe's treatment of the idyllic is a more pronounced

reflection of the larger idyllic notions influencing the prairies from the broader Western Culture including the disparate worlds of international literature and American pop culture.

Thus, through their dialectical modes, MacLeod, Mitchell, and Buckler achieve certain aspects of a distinctive regional sense of place that seem foreign to Vanderhaeghe's mode, but Vanderhaeghe's method carves out equally important and equally revealing territory. That such contrasting modes could be so successful simultaneously, not only in contemporary regional literature but also at the national and international level, is a tribute to these writers and the eclectic tradition of fiction across Canada today.

CANADIAN VOICES FROM THE REGIONS

Chapter 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The original hypothesis about the emergence of dialectical realism as a distinctive and successful mode in regional Canadian fiction is not necessarily the only conclusion supported by the analysis of these writers' fiction. This study also helps to support the conclusions of others, that sense of place is indeed evoked through careful orchestration of voices, both narrative voices and dialogue. Also, like other studies before it, this study finds that a meaningful sense of place is not limited to a physical sense of the regional landscape, but often includes insight into the regional social milieu, including aspects of local myth, ideals, values, and mores, as well as insight into broader aspects of culture, history, politics, and economics.

The central thesis of this study often explores this more profound sense of place, because we have found that a few of the best regional writers employ a mode of dialectical realism that stimulates a heightened awareness of certain aspects of the regions' human geography. More specificallly, Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod in substantial portions of their best fiction juxtapose the idyllic impulses of their regional societies with the darker existential and socioeconomic realities of their region in order to synthesize a more complete vision of the tension between the people's ideals and

their everyday lives. The result is fiction distinctive in mode and in theme due to the unique mosaics of idyllic impulses as well as the varied socioeconomic and cultural realities.

However, even the best generalizations in literature often need the qualification and perspective generated by counter examples. So Vanderhaeghe's fiction acts as a counterpoint to the dialectical mode of the other three, allowing us to compare and contrast another perhaps more established mode of realism that is also highly successful in evoking sense of place. The equal success of his mode prevents hasty generalizations and provides a more balanced overview. Vanderhaeghe, like many other serious writers of contemporary naturalistic fiction, avoids almost all contact with the idyllic, especially with idyllic description of landscape. He depends on dialogizing the narrative voices and the dialogue to highlight the textures of the social milieu, rather than employing the mode of dialectical realism.

Certainly any attempt to be perfectly representative of the regions involved would be doomed by the diversity of good fiction published. So in looking at two Canadian fiction writers whose most enduring novels were published around the middle of the twentieth century, and then leaping to two writers whose prominence has been established only in the last two decades, one can not honestly expect to represent just one single homogeneous trend in either or both of the regions.

The Vanderhaeghe counterpoint and the diversity of successful fiction from these four writers supports an extension of Mandel's conclusion that "any cultural history of Western Canada simply must begin with this problem of pluralism" (Romance 199). He would certainly agree that this applies to Prairie fiction, and this study extends the application to Atlantic fiction. There are regions within regions and the Newfoundland outports have different stories and different myths than the farming communities of Prince Edward Island. The myths and idyllic impulses of the Rocky Mountain foothills or of the northern Saskatchewan forests are a far cry from the elements of idyll common to the Saskatchewan wheatbelt.

Nor does this study simplify sense of place to "a kind of environmentalism that sees the land itself as the determining feature" (Mandel, Romance 199) of the regional literature. In fact, idyllic impulses from various fictional worlds of literature and myth are found to have a role in "creating" such regional realities as the common tensions between human ideals and human behaviour. At first, this seems to support Kroetsch's idea that "we have no identity until someone tells our story, that fiction makes us real" (Mandel, Romance 211) but on the other hand this study sees the social and economic realities inspiring the very language and ideas of our fiction's dialogic voices. The real socioeconomic deprivation of small mining towns in Saskatchewan and Cape Breton plays a definite role in inspiring some of the largely mimetic voices

that haunt the fiction of MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe. So this study sees a contiguous relationship between the regions and the fiction, each helping to create the other, "not in causality but in synchronicity" as Mandel suggests (Romance 197). Thus, the regional idyllic impulses examined in this fiction come partially from the pastorals and regional idylls of our literature, but also this study has demonstrated the influence of idyllic impulses arising from more eclectic regional roots (whether they be inspired by aboriginal, American, local, or hybrid mythology). These idyllic impulses have influenced some of our literature, and they play a significant role in the fiction of dialectical realism.

Although the featured writers are from two politically and geographically defined regions, this study sees a broader definition of "regional" literature that goes beyond centrally defined versions of the Canadian regions. The best fiction of these four writers confirms a growing consensus that what is "regional" in fiction can no longer be automatically defined as outside of the national "mainstream" or necessarily less universal. Although they are from readily identifiable regions in terms of both geography and literary traditions, all four are national fiction writers as much as they are regional writers, and all of them have been appreciated internationally to varying degrees. If there is such a thing as a mainstream in our fiction, it should probably be related, as Frye, MacLulich, and Cooley argue, to the common phenomenon

of sense of place in our best literature. Indeed, each of these writers has a reputation for his sharply projected sense of place, which is often strongly related to alienation from centres of imperial, economic, or hegemonic power. Thus, the alienation and the sense of place in "regional" fictions are spawning the voices that orchestrate a National literature.

The fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod projects a sense of place that includes both the geographic landscape and the social and cultural milieu, while Vanderhaeghe's sense of place focuses mainly on the social geography and the cultural milieu, but all of them evoke that regional sense of alienation from the centres of economic and cultural power. Thus, the very voices of alienation have become a part of Canadian fiction's mainstream. This study is not the first to argue that fiction like MacLeod's or Vanderhaeghe's is just as "mainstream" and just as "regional" (in the best sense of each of these words) as is the fiction of Richler or Munro. It will not be the last study to suggest that the dialogic voices of such regional fiction are a centrifugal artistic force challenging the hegemony of established language and culture.

So in celebrating the regionalism and plurality of Canadian fiction, this study finds a school of dialectical realism that is not necessarily limited to the Prairie or Atlantic regions, but one that grows out of both the relatively short tradition of modern realism in Canadian fiction, and out of a knowledge of the supplanted tradition of

the regional idyll. Some of the fiction of Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod recognizes a broad range of idyllic impulses, both foreign and local, to be part of the "secular scriptures," a community repository of ideals to be exploited in the cause of realism. These writers synthesize a distinctive dialectical realism with a profound sense of place, because they create characters with uniquely regional social and psychological conflicts. Those conflicts involve reconciling the characters' local idyllic impulses and ideals with the darker socioeconomic and cultural realities peculiar to their region.

On the other hand, writers like Vanderhaeghe, Richards, Nowlan, Horwood, Munro, Richler and others have largely eschewed the fictional reflection of idyllic or pastoral impulses, or at least have not made a central point of studying their effects on the regional sense of place. But Vanderhaeghe is a good example of a writer who explores new variations of ironic mode realism in a style that still manifests some heritage of naturalism. He writes in the uncompromisingly tragic and ironic vision often associated with Sinclair Ross, and in contrast with W.O. Mitchell's comic realism and the dialectical mode in *Who Has Seen the Wind*.

In contrast, Alistair MacLeod's fiction shows its roots in the mode of dialectical realism pioneered by Mitchell and Buckler, yet his tragic vision and evocative exploration of social and economic deprivation carry the same intensity and authenticity as Vanderhaeghe's fiction. This study argues

that one of the elements of good fiction that these four writers have in common is their craftsman-like attention to effective narrative voice. Many of Canada's earlier modern fiction writers were not known as great stylists or innovators in regards to narrative voice, but both Mitchell and Buckler have reputations for unique narrative language style, although their skills in narrative strategies were not immediately recognized. However, in narrative strategy and in dialogizing narrative voice, both MacLeod and Vanderhaeghe have developed reputations for distinctive innovation and craftsmanship.

In all four cases, and increasingly with Vanderhaeghe's and MacLeod's fiction, the narrative voices have recreated the regional "voices" of their times. From the articulate cognitive processes of David Canaan and Digby to the raconteur-like, ruminative, anecdotal, and oral vernacular of MacLeod's narrators and Vanderhaeghe's characters, these authors have orchestrated the polyphony of languages from their region's social milieu. Their dialogized voices educate the reader to the linguistic dimensions of the social stratification and the cultural history to which their characters belong.

This study finds that MacLeod's narrative strategies generally include rediscovering the dynamics of the reliable narrator, while Vanderhaeghe virtually always employs unreliable narrators or fallible filters, but often with an ironic complexity due to differences in cognitive distancing

and emotional distancing. Both methods are quite effective in developing a sense of place by orchestrating the languages of the region's social milieu.

Of Mitchell and Buckler, this study finds that their best fiction can not be legitimately regarded as merely a transition between the regional idyll and modern realism, because the idyllic impulses reflected by the voices of such novels as *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Mountain and the Valley* are consciously crafted as part of a dialectic that is entirely within the modes of modern realism. Buckler's dialectic creates a tragic realism with universal implications about the psychological development of an artist and the ironies of the search for a rural Eden, while Mitchell's dialectic forges a tragicomic vision exploring the foibles and idylls of the prairie social milieu as well as the socialization and individuation of his child protagonist. The pioneering efforts of Mitchell and Buckler to chronicle the regional idyllic impulses (to enhance their mimetic realism) have resulted in a developing, innovative, and distinctive mode of dialectical realism in contemporary Canadian fiction found at its best in MacLeod's fiction.

The influence of this dialectical mode could be explored further in some of the contemporary fiction of Gabrielle Roy (*Ces Enfants de ma Vie*), Howard O'Hagan (*Wilderness Men*), David Carpenter ("Luce"), Sheldon Currie ("Pomp and Circumstances"), Nancy Bauer (*The Opening Eye*), and the list

could go on. There is no doubt, however, that Vanderhaeghe's fiction represents a large and continuing contrapuntal tradition in sharp contrast to that of Mitchell, Buckler, and Macleod. I have already mentioned some contemporary authors like Vanderhaeghe who continue to adhere to the stricter modes of ironic realism with some tenacious roots in turn-of-the-century naturalism. These two schools of contemporary Canadian realism contrast sharply in their responses to that turn-of-the-century Canadian literary conflict between the regional idyll and modern realism.

Due to its limited focus, this study might well raise at least a couple of broader questions beyond the tentative conclusions proffered. For example, some broader surveys of Commonwealth literature or surveys in comparative literature might raise the question of whether other politically autonomous but newly emerging post-colonial cultures experience similar patterns of regional idyllic literature followed by a reaction against the local idyllic art, and whether some writers have chronicled the local idyllic impulses to enhance a mode of dialectical realism. The other major question spawned by this study, but not fully answered due to its highly subjective nature, is whether it is possible to evoke as complete a sense of place for such regions without addressing the local idyllic notions and the conflicts that they generate with the socioeconomic and existential realities. Certainly, some of Vanderhaeghe's fiction proves

that there is more than one way to evoke a distinctive and powerful sense of place, but Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod have tapped into a rich vein that others fiction writers might be tempted to mine.

In a brief summary then, this study finds that some of the best regional Canadian fiction by Mitchell, Buckler, and MacLeod, discovers a distinctive sense of place through an orchestration of voices that often juxtaposes the idyllic impulses of the region with the larger socioeconomic and cultural realities. In contrast, Vanderhaeghe (and other writers of contemporary naturalism) continue to avoid overt exploration of idyllic impulses (especially idyllic landscape or idyllic characters) in the tradition of Sinclair Ross. Still, Vanderhaeghe also evokes an effective sense of place with his finely developed ironic modes. But what Vanderhaeghe has in common with MacLeod, Mitchell, and Buckler is a journeyman's dedication to developing innovative and effective narrative strategies and styles for orchestrating the voices arising out of the social milieu of their regions. One conclusion not likely to be debated is that the pluralism reflected in their styles and themes, along with the profundity and universality of their visions, bodes well for fiction in Canada.

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